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JULY 14, 1928

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By MAX BRAND

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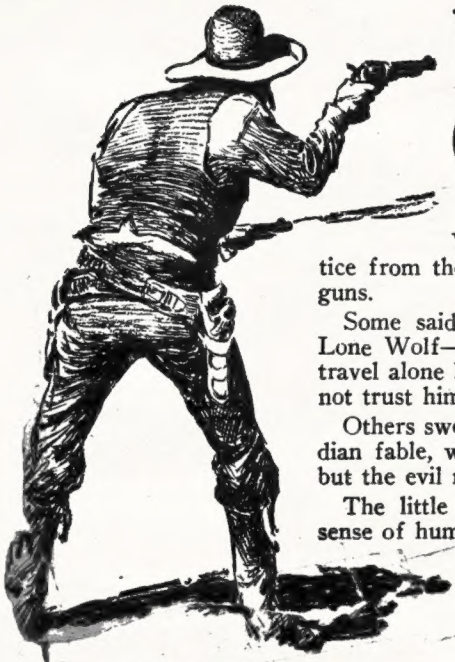

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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXIX July 14, 1928 No. 4

Gunman's Goal

(A Story of Geraldi)

By Max Brand

Author of "Three on the Trail," etc.

CHAPTER I.

GERALDI RISES EARLY.

WITH the dawn, Geraldi rose. He spread a folded blanket on the floor and knelt upon it like an Arab about to pray toward the East. Instead of prayer Geraldi took out a dice box and fell to work, shaking the dice until they rattled again with a great clatter and then shooting them out upon the blanket, so that they flashed over and over and came to a pause at its end.

It looked like the simplest matter in the world, but the smooth brow of Geraldi was fixed with thought, for the trick was not so simple as it appeared. Try, you who doubt, to hold two dice invisibly in the fingers of the same hand that holds the dice box, and yet make those dice rattle prodigiously against each other, and against the leather sides of the box! Do this, then, with an apparent abandon, a careless gesture flinging the dice before one. So Geraldi managed, and sent the dice spinning away, and nine times out of ten he called his turn.

But that was not all. For a half hour he continued this task. Then he varied

it, and for a half hour he spun the winking dice down the blanket and made them bounce back from the wall. Enough to destroy all chances of cheating, say the gamblers, but Geraldi knew better. Dice can be made to listen to speech, the negroes believe; if Geraldi did not believe quite so much as that, at least he was willing to trust to manipulation past the point where manipulation was possible.

He bounced the dice against the wall, and still two times out of four he won, or three times out of five as luck added to his skill.

Then Geraldi abandoned the dice and sat down cross-legged by the blanket. He took two packs of cards and began to deal poker hands continuously, mixing, dealing, flicking the hands up for examination.

He spoke a few words from time to time: "I win!" "I lose." "He wins." "You win!" And only once did he make a mistake. That time he looked upward with a faint smile, as if to say to the god of gamblers: "Suppose I had put a million on that!"

For a whole hour Geraldi worked at this task with perfect patience.

After that, he rolled the blanket, placed it at the foot of the bed, and lay down with his head upon that roll. He was not to rest, however. He produced two revolvers, full-sized .45s, heavy and long of barrel, and these he began to spin into the air. He made them cross from hand to hand. He caught them muzzle down upon the tips of his fingers. He caught them handle down. He made them alight upon one another, handles to handles, or mouth to mouth. Those heavy guns floated from one hand to the other like foolish birds on the wing, graceful and purposeless. Or rather they seemed like bright ghosts more than metal and wood, for the rapid spinning which Geraldi imparted to them made them disappear in mid-air, as though by conjury.

Fast and slow, he kept at this task for a full fifteen minutes. And when at last he stood up, he was perspiring and panting. Then he cleaned and loaded the guns and put them away in cunning slip holsters beneath his armpits.

Still his work was not ended. He had brought up to his room a square of soft, spongy wood a foot across. On this he drew with pencil a black cross, the lines just sufficiently wide to be visible across the room. After that, he opened his pack and took out a folding case of soft, thick chamois which he untied and spread. There appeared a set of eight knives, like hunting knives, in a way, and yet with handles which hardly were adequate to accommodate a struggling, straining hand through all the ardors of skinning a deer or a bear. The blade was narrow and only slightly curved.

He laid the knives on the edge of the little table in the center of the room and began to juggle them. The ceiling was not high, and yet before long he had six of those winking bits of steel fluttering and gleaming in the air, twinkling down into his hands to be flicked up again with a spin so violent that they hung aloft as though suspended by invisible wings.

He restored them to the table edge and immediately began to flip them at the penciled cross, holding them in the flat of his palm. Lightly they shot across the room and buried themselves in the target. When all eight were affixed, the outstanding handles rudely fashioned a cross!

He drew them out and examined the marks. Two had alighted fairly upon the lines. The others were a sufficient distance to either side to make Geraldi shake his handsome head. He repeated the attempt, and again and again, but with every repetition his work grew a little more inaccurate. A cloud settled upon that brow, smooth as a child's.

But, abandoning this work, he turned the board and penciled a shaded circle in the center, large as the palm of a hand—a slender hand, like that of Geraldi. At this target he made play in a new fashion, walking about the room at the farther end and, whenever his back was fairly turned upon the goal, spinning and casting. Only one of the eight blades struck the central circle. But the rest were grouped closely around it. And Geraldi actually frowned—as he plucked out his handful of steel and recommenced operations. He finally had planted four of the eight knives in the center of the goal, and with this he seemed to rest satisfied.

An oil stone and a few drops of oil, and he proceeded to sharpen the eight at the points, and made sure that all the edges were keen.

Still his morning's work was incomplete.

He began a most strange operation, which was an attempt to climb to the top of the casing which framed his door. This was to be managed with finger-holds hardly half an inch deep, and the feet were helpless. By arm power alone he must support himself. Moreover, all must be managed so softly, so delicately, that a sleeper in the room beneath that creaking floor of pine would not be roused when Geraldi's grip slipped and he dropped to the floor again. Light as a bird with stretched wings, he fell. Patient as a spider, he would recommence his climbing until after a half hour he was able to attain to his foolish goal, which was to thrust himself up with one arm above the top of the door frame, and with the other hand catch at the board which rimmed the ceiling. In that manner he was able to support himself for a whole minute, flattened against the wall. Finally he lowered himself to the floor again.

Silent as that work had been, he was breathing hard—yet so controlling every breath that not a sound was heard! His face was flushed, the veins throbbed in his forehead, and perspiration ran down his face like water.

He lay for a moment stretched on his back on the floor.

By magic, as it were, all token of fatigue left him. As the stunned, half-beaten boxer sinks helpless on his stool at the end of a round, loose-muscled, weak, and in the single minute of rest recovers himself—his eye clears, the cords of strength stand up again along his legs, his arms, his shoulders, and he can leap like a tiger into the ring at the next tap upon the gong—so rose Geraldi.

Then the hotel bathroom, a thick lather of soap, a cold bath, a strong rub with a towel, and he was ready to dress.

This could be an affair of an instant, when occasion demanded. But now there was leisure. For three hours—since four in the morning—he had been constantly at work with hands, wits, or the full play of his muscles. And still he was a shade early for breakfast!

Fine, snowy linen was next to the skin of Geraldi. He wore not socks but golf stockings of thin, English wool which clasped themselves in place through their own elasticity. On his slender feet he fitted low shoes, extremely wide and low of heel, and rather square across the toes. Across the ball of the foot and at the heel were inset corrugated strips of the finest rubber, and the sole leather was so thin, so jointed, that the foot had all the freedom that is given by a tennis shoe.

Made after this method, clumsy shoes they would have been except that a master craftsman had fashioned them. They had a look of comfort; they possessed a touch of fashion, also.

Geraldi, as critical of these as a swordsman of another century would have been of a sword blade, moved swiftly and lightly around the room, side-stepping, retreating, like a pugilist shadow-boxing. But at last he was sat-

isfied. He stepped into thin, gray-flannel clothes, the looseness of the trousers and the sleeves accentuating the slenderness of his body and making it appear—what it was not—a trifle weak.

The looseness of those sleeves served another purpose—they enabled him to hang that bulky pair of revolvers beneath his armpits. And yet, though a thousand times before he had done this, now he stood and twisted and turned before the mirror, making certain of what movements to the side were apt to reveal the jutting handles or the muzzles of the weapons.

When he had, for this thousandth and first time, reassured himself upon this point, he proceeded to make himself confident upon a still more important subject. He tried the guns singly. He tried them both together, flicking them out with one brief gesture.

The warriors of the West had practiced intricate rolls and prepared themselves for shooting from the hip, because, so doing, they did not waste the vital hundredth part of a second necessary to raise the gun to the line of the eye. But the method of Geraldi was better. The very act of drawing flung the weapon into position for an aimed shot.

He had no doubt of these guns, or of these movements, but like a general confident in the efficiency of his army, he constantly kept himself in review and under inspection.

So when he stepped out from his room, with a straw hat in one hand and a narrow Malacca stick in the other, Geraldi looked quite a dandified type—a figure which would bring forth wide grins when he appeared on the street in this rough Western town. But in spite of appearances he was ready for the test, for he was an athlete who had to be forever at the top of his form. He was like a champion who never knew when the supreme test might come and whom the world could challenge when it would. His reward was simply life preserved; but one defeat would be death, to Geraldi!

CHAPTER II.

TWO OLD FRIENDS MEET.

THE dining room of the hotel was proof that San Felice was now a booming town. It had had a treble life—first it was laid out as a sort of mountain metropolis, all the squares blocked out, corner stones laid to mark the streets, and many frame shacks run up. Then San Felice died. The knees of the houses were sprung by wind and neglect and their backs were broken by time. San Felice recovered suddenly on rumor that a railroad was coming that way. There were a few years of frantic life. That ended. Decay set forward once more. But this was the third boom, not a sudden flowering, but a gradual growth. Chance had decided that San Felice was to be turned into a real town because lumber was being felled in the mountains, and some one had found copper ore worth mining. Besides, the cattle business had crept up out of the desert, out of the hills, and now new range was opening to the south of the town.

So Geraldi found the dining room well filled even for breakfast. From the prominent lumberman and the well-to-do tourist down to the professional idler and the hard-working cow-punchers and lumberjacks, all were in the same room, almost elbow to elbow. But even the tourist, who sat at the corner table by the window with his pretty daughter, had made concessions to Western fashions, Western style. And his daughter might have passed as a cowgirl, with a broad-brimmed hat set back on her head, a loose, blue blouse, and a silken bandanna knotted at her throat. Only Geraldi made no concessions. As he stood in the door, he was complete to his panama and his thin, chamois

gloves. He was a little stooped, it appeared, as though he were inertly relaxed. One would have said that a touch of wind might stagger him; he seemed even a trifle hollow-chested.

Then he saw a small table at the side of the room with two places, one of which was taken by a big lumberjack who attacked his food vigorously, his elbows swinging out at wide angles, his head dipping far down toward his plate of ham and eggs.

Geraldi made for the vacant chair through a little silence which had fallen upon the room. The silence was broken by the rumble of the rich lumberman on the farther side: "Now what does a thing like that mean by comin' out here and exposin' himself to the open air?"

"He'll get ate up with rust," said another.

"Leave him be," replied a third, "because the more rich young fools that we get out here, the better it is for us!"

These remarks were made in voices which were hardly veiled, yet one would not have thought that they could have carried to the ear of Geraldi. On the contrary, he would have heard every syllable if they had been little more than whispers, and not a whit of his smile diminished—a little, sleepy smile, half politeness, half content with himself, and a spice of satisfaction with the world at large.

But in fact it was not all acting. He wanted to make exactly that impression—a rich young man—a rich young fool.

"Is this chair taken?" asked Geraldi.

The lumberjack looked up into his eyes, then slowly surveyed him to the floor.

"I don't see nobody in it," he observed, and turned his attack upon his last slice of ham.

Geraldi sat down, a little gingerly, and turned his smile around the room. He had seen two or three heads go up as he entered, and he knew what that meant. So the fox sticks its nose in the air when it sees the goose. They had seen Geraldi—three card sharps, he made them out at a glance. And two of them, perhaps, with a great deal of ready cash. The smile of Geraldi grew still more bright, for these were his particular prey. Not in vain was he called the "Frigate Bird." Upon the sea hawks he preyed, leveling tribute.

"Whacha havin'?" the waitress shot at him as she went by with an armful of dishes. "Whacha havin', hey?"

She did not stop; she merely turned sidewise, and Geraldi raised his head and allowed his smile to grow more marked. Sun-browned and dark of eye, a glorious head was Geraldi's. The waitress blinked and came to an unsteady halt.

"Coffee and toast!"

She went on again, still blinking.

"I found a feller——" she began to her chum in the pantry.

"I seen you did," said her irreverent friend. "Go pet him, dearie, and see won't he pur!"

"Coffee an' toast!" said the lumberjack at the table with Geraldi. "Now what kind of a meal is that, to start a day with?"

"Ah," said Geraldi, "I have an aversion to heavy breakfasts. A light stomach makes a light heart, I feel!"

He laughed a little. The laughter was not returned by the lumberjack. The latter paused, one cheek bulging with a wedge of ham; his eyes were glassy with disapproval.

"Huh!" said the lumberjack, and finished his meal with a few broad gestures, the last of which emptied a coffee cup at a mouthful.

He rose and went across the room with heavy heels.

"Pretty lady, ain't he?" said he, hooking a thumb over his shoulder.

There was more general laughter at this comment, but still Geraldi did not seem to hear it. He put his elbows lightly on the edge of the table, joined

the tips of his fingers, and slowly turned his hands so as to admire or criticize the condition of his nails.

Even the tourist, politely inattentive to disagreeable objects, now looked at Geraldi askance, and the lip of his pretty daughter was frankly curling. Then the coffee and toast arrived. The waitress hung a moment over the table; was rewarded with another smile; retreated flushed and foolish of face.

But here there was a bit of diversion which took attention from Geraldi. A big cow-puncher, a plump, large man, was riding past the hotel when a dog ran at him barking and the horse straightway began to perform as though a demon had been wakened in him. It was an artistic exhibition of pitching. With arched back, hard as rock, the pony heaved itself into the air and came down on alternate forelegs. It whirled as though on an oiled pedestal. It snapped itself this way and that, and the enthusiasm of the crowd in the dining room grew enormous. Even the tourist and his daughter left their table and joined the crowd at the windows.

Geraldi, however, did not stir. He went on with his coffee and toast, eating daintily, in smiling content, oblivious to the yells of pleasure:

"Ride him, cowboy!"

"Scratch him fore and aft!"

"Look at him ride straight up. That's a boy!"

Apparently the rider was mastering the horse. Presently the crowd went back to their chairs, and now the hero in person appeared in the doorway.

He seemed far from a Western puncher in all but dress. Your ordinary range rider is a leathery, sun-dried fellow. This was a round, soft man, tall, ponderous. He was not greatly darkened by weather, and there was a bright pink in either cheek.

He looked around the room for a place.

"That little old son of a gun," said the puncher. "He's apt to act up a bit. He gets tired of the look of me and wants to turn me inside out!"

He spotted the empty chair and came to Geraldi's table.

"This free?"

"No charge at all," smiled Geraldi, and the other sank into the chair.

He ordered "oatmeal, bacon, four eggs, plenty of bread, and don't forget the butter!"

And then he gave his cheerful attention to his table companion. He seemed to be talking of ordinary commonplaces, but his voice was so skillfully pitched that none of their neighbors could hear the conversation.

"So here we meet again!" said the fat puncher.

"We meet again, Cousin Edgar!" said Geraldi.

"Not 'cousin', please," said the other, with a touch of annoyance. "Let the past die. Every day is dead except this one and to-morrow."

"I'll raise no ghosts," said Geraldi. "Have you been having luck?"

"Ah, fair—fair!" said the man called Edgar. "I've had my chances, and used them fairly well, here and there. Fortune helps the bold, you know!"

"But not always," smiled Geraldi.

"No?" said the other, rubbing his soft, thick palms together. "As a matter of fact, I lost a great opportunity. Through you, of course. But I don't mind. I bear no grudges. If only I could understand what was in your mind at the time. What set you on?"

"Why, guess, Edgar."

"The girl, I was sure. You wanted to marry my dear little niece. Was that it? No, because you could have had her for the asking, my dear boy. The beautiful and romantic Geraldi made her dizzy."

Geraldi raised his hand, and the other nodded complacently.

"Very well," said he. "I'll drop that theme."

"If you please," said Geraldi, with just a hint of cold danger in his smile. "But as for motives, Edgar, it was chiefly the pleasure of taking a hand against a very clever fellow—a man who had worked out an idea and based it on bed rock."

"Then you saw that I had a fish in my claws," said Edgar. "And—they call you the frigate bird!"

Geraldi made a gesture as foreign as his name.

"That's ended," said he.

"And you bear me no malice now, Geraldi."

"No more, at least, than you bear me!"

"Come, come! I'm not such a hypocrite. When a man does evil, my dear boy, he has to be prepared to lose—and lose gracefully! I did that, I think! Now, Geraldi—let me tell you that I never was gladder to see a man than I am to see you to-day. If you can work with me, I can put you on the trail of the greatest coup even you have ever had in hand! But the question is: Can you work with me?"

"Ah," said Geraldi, dropping his forehead in his hand, "let me think it over!"

CHAPTER III.

SHORT HISTORY OF THE SUN.

WHILE Geraldi was lost in thought, in this manner, Edgar seemed to pay attention to nothing but his breakfast. He ate hugely, with constant relish. For there was nothing so bad that he failed to find some thread of enjoyment mingled with the evil. The porridge was burned, but still he wrinkled his nose—and ate it swiftly! The toast was soggy. He turned up the brown side of each piece and consumed it without hesitation. The coffee was a frightful compound, but he turned it gray with canned milk and swallowed it with avidity.

Still Geraldi thought.

"What sort of work may it be?" he asked.

"Good work—happy work—the very sort of work that you would enjoy, 'Slim Jim.'"

At the use of this name, Geraldi looked up with a quizzical lift of his brows.

"Frankly," he said, "I've been having a dull time. Only had one thing to interest me lately."

"That?" asked Edgar.

"I don't mind telling you. You see the fellow with the pretty daughter? There they get up, now."

"A grand-looking fellow," said Edgar. "And a charming girl. But you're not interested in girls, Geraldi."

"If you don't mind," said Geraldi, "we'll forget that name altogether!"

"True, true," replied Edgar. "I forget that you are famous. One murmur of that name, and all your work is hopeless, useless, wasted. The fish fly away from you; you starve in a desert of cautious men!"

This description made Geraldi chuckle. "It's true," he said. "It's exactly true. I begin to be too well known; my trail has crossed itself too often. Even in London, even in Paris, people begin to know me. The fish are warned off just as they rise to the bait. I am growing lean and evil, Edgar. I am growing cruel with hunger!"

"Of course," said Edgar. "But not a thin pocketbook?"

"No," said Geraldi. "Crime pays me very well, as usual. I find that there is always money in the bank. But that isn't the point. Why does a man hunt big game? For the heads? For the masks? For the horns or the hides? Or does he hunt to fill the pot?"

"No," said Edgar. "It's for the sake of seeing the tiger's eyes turn into torches as he charges. Then put out the flame!"

"You understand me," said Geraldi, "like a brother. But I have found that

the big game no longer charges. It runs the other way. I've been reduced to perfectly foolish things—like watching that gray-headed man and his girl for the last few days."

"What are they?"

"He's an Egyptologist. He's done some very neat excavating. His house in Boston is a museum full of prizes. He reads hieroglyphics as fluently as I read the newspaper."

"That doesn't sound exciting," said Edgar. "It must be the girl, then?"

Geraldi shrugged his shoulders.

"Did you look at her?"

"Yes. She's pretty enough to qualify."

"She's a very good girl," said Geraldi. "Very good, modern type. She knows a good deal about life. She's been taught to face it, you see. Cheerful, good-natured, clever, rather witty—no dog, no false pride about her, and a devoted daughter."

"Sounds a nice dish," said Edgar.

"But for lack of seasoning——" said Geraldi. "You know how it is?"

"Of course I do," said the other criminal. "People who live in the underworld grow to like shadows, and fire."

"And the underworld women, Edgar, can be seen by their own light."

"No doubt. Still, Geraldi, that's a weakness."

"To prefer them, you mean?"

"Yes. Now, for my part, some day I expect to marry a quiet woman with a pleasant house, a cheerful little garden, perhaps a pasture where the cows graze—a modest place, a modest woman—then let the years go by like oiled silk!"

"The Arab," grinned Geraldi, "is always thinking of the green oasis. But I know you're right. It's the fatal defect with me. Otherwise I feel strong. Otherwise I feel like Achilles. I have no partners to betray me; dope and drink never could take hold on me. I know my work and how to handle the tools of my trade. But, of course, I was held by the heel before I was dipped in the river. And one of these days some woman who—as we've just said—can be seen by her own light will——"

He left the sentence unfinished. The fat man looked him steadily in the face and then nodded with much gravity. He poured himself another cup of coffee and remarked: "I'm losing a terrible lot of caste by being seen here wasting my time on an effeminate tramp like you, James."

"You are," admitted Geraldi. "You'd better walk back into your rôle of honest cow-puncher."

"First, I want to find out why you're interested in the Egyptologist."

Geraldi drummed his finger tips lightly on the table and his keen eyes gleamed at the fat man.

"I shouldn't talk," he said, "but I allow you to persuade me, this morning. Well, then, a few days ago when I was out for an early morning stroll—before sunup, in fact—I saw a man standing on top of that little hill, east of the town. He stood as still as an Indian, with his arms folded, facing the spot where the sun would rise. There's a stretch of poplars at the bottom of that hill, as you know. I slipped along through them until I could get a close view of him. Then I saw that he had a queer headdress on. He had a box folded between his arms and his breast."

"He had a what?" asked Edgar.

Geraldi hesitated.

"Why are you so interested?" he asked.

"Because," said Edgar, "people don't stand like cranes on the top of a hill before sunup."

This assurance seemed to satisfy Geraldi, but only after he had turned the words back and forth in his mind several times, and had weighed and re-

weighed them. He took Edgar with the utmost seriousness, as it appeared.

"At any rate," went on Geraldi, "after a time this fellow raised the box in both hands and held it before him, now, and above his head at the end of his straight arms."

"And what did it look like?" asked Edgar.

"I looked at it through my glass," said James Geraldi. "Unfortunately, I couldn't make it out. You see, it was turned toward the brightness in the east, so that I was a little dazzled. I should have said that it was covered with some sort of metal work—golden chasing, perhaps! But the box was the smallest part of the show. It had a setting: tall man against the sunrise sky. It had the man himself for the action. It had words, too. The oddest words that you ever heard in your life!"

He paused and nodded to himself, in conviction. Then he said slowly: "What would you think, Edgar, if you heard a fellow like that suddenly say in a loud voice, as solemnly as any priest: 'Horus on the two horizons; golden Horus; Horus of the two eyes'——"

"The deuce," said the fat man. "I should say that he was a bit nutty. Or a poet, maybe."

"Would you?" asked Geraldi. "Well, that was all he said. I slipped on around the side of the hill and had a glimpse of the girl—apparently waiting there for her father to come down."

"How did she look?" asked Edgar.

"She? Dashed unhappy she looked," replied Geraldi. "And looking up as if she half expected her poor father to go up in a cloud of fire! But I didn't glance at her too closely. She had a right to some privacy, I should say. I came home, with my mind made up to keep an eye on the pair later on."

"I don't make it out," said Edgar, shaking his head. "What was it he said?"

"'Horus on the two horizons, golden Horus; Horus of the two eyes,'" quoted Geraldi.

"Who the deuce was Horus, James?"

"You know something about Egypt?"

"I've skipped that. No. Hardly a thing."

"They worshiped the sun, Edgar Do you want me to tell you about it?"

"I do—if this fellow Horus has a place in it!"

"Of course he had a place! They worshiped the sun, but they thought of it under a lot of different names. The sun god was the chief god, do you see? Now, you know, it went this way. Every town had its own chief god. But when the sun god began to be more important than their own village, the clever priests would add the solar disk to the outfit of their own deity. They would make him a god of the sun, too!"

"A little confusing, Jimmy," said the fat man, "but I try to follow. A whole crowd began to claim the sun, then?"

"Exactly! But not all at the same moment. They split the old sun, not into parts, but they took him at different positions. For instance, there was Ra. He was the first of the sun gods, no doubt. And he remained at the top, in a way, because he was considered to be in the sun boat when it was floating across the blue waters at noon."

"You get poetical, Jimmy."

"I beg your pardon. I forgot! Then there was Osiris. He was the sun of night. That is to say, the sun as it disappears in the evening and as it comes up again in the morning. In other words, Osiris is killed by Set, the evil god of night; and therefore poor Osiris has to live underground and be king of the dead. But every morning he is restored to life, just as Isis restored him to life in the good old days. But you're tired of this history lesson?"

"Not a bit."

"Very well, then. The sun flushing

up in the east is re-born Osiris. But then as he rises, the sun is Khepri, a scarab rolling the golden disk of the sun up the sky. You see, the heat of the sun hatches the eggs of the beetle. So they connect the beetle with the god. Khepri is the special god of creation. He himself rises out of the slime of the night every morning."

"I follow that. I can see how that myth came to be."

"But now, then, there was still an important position of the sun not accounted for. That was the most beautiful of all. It is when the sun hangs in the east or in the west, not close enough in the horizon mist to have its cheeks pulled out, but looking bigger than in the middle sky, and all golden—all red gold. There you are, do you see, with your Horus. The god of the two horizons. Golden Horus. Horus of the two eyes—that is to say, of the sun and the moon!"

"And you knew all this stuff?" said Edgar, smiling. "Or did you look it up?"

"Is there a public library in this town?" asked Geraldi. "No, I remembered that much. There's tons more, of course, that one could know."

"What was the headdress that you spoke of?"

"It looked to me like a wig such as the old Pharaohs used to wear."

"This is pretty rum!" said Edgar. "The man's a nut. That's plain!"

"If you look up his record you won't think so. Six months ago, even, he did something frightfully brilliant, in locating a tomb no one ever had dreamed of finding. Unluckily, the thieves had spotted the place a couple of milleniums earlier still. There was nothing but bare walls, I believe, for him to find, a broken mummy case, and a little scattered rubbish. But it was a great stroke. Results of years of study and guessing. No, Robert Christy Ingall is not a simple lunatic."

"He may be a complex one, though."

Geraldi shrugged his shoulders.

"I've talked to you long enough," he announced. "Now talk to me."

"But what are you going to do about the crazy man, Jimmy? That interests me a lot."

"I'll have a look at him, I suppose," said Geraldi. "I'll investigate his possessions, some day or some night, and I'll particularly have a long look at that box and what's inside it, if anything!"

"That should be easy," said Edgar. "A poor fellow with a broken-down brain——"

"Broken-down brain?" echoed Geraldi. "Who said so? But, as a matter of fact, let me tell you how this harmless fellow, as you call him, used to spend his vacations! Shooting big game in darkest Africa, my dear Edgar!"

"And how did you learn that?"

"One has ears," said Geraldi shamelessly. "One walks about. If one hears a few words here and there—well, that can't be helped! This fellow is a famous hero, in African hunting tales. He is also a great Egyptologist—which means a brain and a half, let me tell you. And, in addition to that, here he is in the Southwest standing on a hilltop and talking to a god of Egypt who died at least a couple of thousand years ago!"

"Why here?" asked Edgar. "Why a hill in this State?"

"Yes," said Geraldi. "Boston is his home town. Why does he have to leave all his relatives and friends and come down here to the edge of the world? Will he find something here?"

"That same Horus, perhaps!" chuckled Edgar. "But now, Jimmy, I want your serious attention."

"You have it, unqualified."

"I asked you if you could work with me. You didn't answer. Now tell me?"

"It depends on the work," said Ger-

aldi. "You and I, Edgar, are both crooks——"

"A rough, hard word," grinned the other.

"But we do different things, and we do them in different ways. Now, what I want to know is: Is this work after my own taste?"

"I can promise you one thing," said Edgar. "This work is so dangerous that I couldn't imagine anything better suited to you!"

"I'm not a salamander," answered Geraldi with a touch of irritation. "I can't live in fire, you know."

"You can," answered Edgar. "You can live in it and prosper. I've seen you! Well, I forgive you for the trouble you've made for me in the past. I put you a new proposition with enough danger in it to make you tremble, even if every hair on your head is a separate life. I want you, old son, to join me in the job of stealing that same box from the great Egyptologist and his pretty daughter."

Geraldi's brows flickered up.

"What has Ingall done to me or to any man that he should deserve to have that box stolen from him?" he asked.

"In the first place," said the other, "how does he come by that box?"

"Go on," demanded Geraldi.

"I," said the fat man, "was nearer to that box than you were. And on the front of it, by means of my glass, I was able to make out a big lump of green——"

"Glass," said Geraldi.

"Emerald!" said the fat man.

CHAPTER IV.

DOGS AND BONES.

TWO dogs may play cheerfully together for hours, but let a bone fall between them, and instantly they are at war. So it was now with Geraldi and his companion, who sat glaring at one another with that quenchless hunger in their eyes. Then Geraldi made a cigarette and lighted it.

"Go on!" said he.

He added, with that bright smile of his which showed a flash of the whitest of teeth: "You knew about the old Egyptologist all along? You dog!"

"He's not old," said the fat man. "He's not a year more'n forty-three."

"Did he marry when he was fourteen?" asked Geraldi.

"The girl's not so old, either. She's only twenty—even. She looks older. That's because papa has given her a few things to think about."

"Go on, Edgar. Tell me the inside of the story, will you?"

"I can't," lamented the other. "I'll tell you how it is, though. I found that the slickest gang of crooks in the world was after this fellow. Five expensive birds, Geraldi—five royal hawks all flying at one poor heron!"

"That's strange," said Geraldi. "Who are they?"

"One is a pure-blooded Arab or something out of the way. His name is——"

"Seyf Kalam," said Geraldi.

"Great Scott! Do you know everybody in the world?"

"Once when I was taking a yacht down the Red Sea," began Geraldi, "on a hot evening, with the sails slatting on the masts, and the mosquitoes all around in black clouds——"

His voice trailed away.

"Well," he went on, "I know Seyf. And the other night, I thought I saw a familiar profile go past a door!"

"Well," said the other, "Seyf is one of them. And I've spotted three of the rest. One is a talented Mexican crook of good family, with a Paris education that went deeper than books. I mean Pedro Oñate."

"I've missed that one," replied Geraldi.

"You probably know him, but not his name. Another is Lucien Rompier."

"I don't know him, either."

"Perhaps not. A great artist with a pen, that Rompier!"

"Greater than you, Edgar?" smiled Geraldi.

The other extended his fat hands in a gesture of modesty.

"Why compare?" said he. "The fourth man of the crew wears an old Italian name to which he has no right at all. I mean to say: Giovanni Strozzi."

"I know him like a brother," said Geraldi.

"You would," said Edgar. "Then there's a fifth man. I haven't been able to make him out. Perhaps you can. Tallish fellow. Strong in the shoulders. A little pale. Handsome. Looks like an athlete. He runs the job, I gather."

"No, no," said Geraldi. "Strozzi never took orders in his life!"

"He takes them now," persisted Edgar.

"Then," said Geraldi with confidence, "the number five is what the newspapers are fond of calling a 'super-criminal.'"

"Friend," replied Edgar, "he is a little more than that! He's a man, Jimmy, worth a trip across the ocean merely to see. I've seen him only once in his real person. Then again, there was a certain something about a big Mexican muleteer that made me suspect it was the same chap in disguise. He seems able to step into any rôle and play it perfectly. Rather like the celebrated Geraldi!"

"A very neat and kind compliment," said Geraldi, nodding his thanks. "And the five of them are after my Egyptologist?"

"They are."

"And they want what?"

"The box, of course."

"For the sake of the emerald that's on the front of it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Is any emerald large enough to be the reward of five such fellows? I know the price of Strozzi and of Seyf Kalam, for instance!"

"The others are just as high. But the emerald would be big enough to satisfy them all, I think. But, Jimmy, there's undoubtedly something inside the box. Otherwise, it wouldn't be wearing such a stone on its forehead!"

"That's a reasonable suggestion."

"And, therefore, I say, this job is made to order for you."

"I have my little scruples," said Geraldi.

An expression of the keenest dislike glittered in the eyes of the fat man for a moment. But he mastered it quickly.

"Let me tell you," said he, "that I understand the little scruples, as you call them. But I want to point out to you that the Ingalls never owned an emerald like that one. Neither did Ingall ever find a box like that one—in Egypt. At least," said the fat man, leaning a little forward to make his point, "he never put it down on the records. If he had, at least a half interest would have gone to the Egyptian government! So you see, Jimmy, that your scruples about never taking from honest men don't need to bother you here!"

"He found it in Egypt, beyond any doubt."

"Right!"

"And he held it out?"

"Make up your mind for yourself!" Edgar replied.

"Well," said Geraldi, "I grow more and more interested. I'm very glad that you picked out this table for breakfast. In fact, I didn't quite suspect that you'd be willing to speak to me again."

"I'm a man of tolerance," said the other. "Besides, I believe in respecting the idiosyncrasies of humanity. Tell me flat—are you in for this?"

"To beat the five to the box?"

"Just that!"

"It's odd," said Geraldi, "that they haven't succeeded in getting that box long ago—five master minds, five master hands."

"You pointed out yourself that Ingall is not a fool; and that he's a hunter!"

"I pointed out a good many things that you knew already."

"I was glad to hear anything from such an esteemed collaborator. But to continue. Mr. Ingall has been having a lot of bad luck, lately. When he was in San Antone, he went out for a ride in the early morning—his favorite time, as you've noticed—and a couple of burly brutes jumped him from the bushes. Bad fellows, gunmen, they were found to be. Well—he dropped them both! Oh, very neat work! He got a pair of bullets through his coat. That was all. Then again, one day as he and his daughter were driving along in a buckboard through the hills, three men blocked their road behind. Ingall gave his horses the whip. They galloped like wildfire straight into a pass where half a dozen fellows stood up and opened fire. The buckboard was jumping and bouncing like mad, and that probably disturbed the aim of the six in the mouth of the pass. But it didn't particularly disturb the aim of Ingall. His daughter grabbed the reins and the whip out of his hand. He stood up in that crazy, jumping buckboard like a sailor standing up in a fishing boat in a choppy sea. And he fought with a Colt in each hand, and with his long hair flying. He looked like a picture of 1840! The wildest kind of Wild West!"

"You were there," observed Geraldi.

The other colored a little.

"I was showing you that the five had really been doing their best, but Ingall simply has been able to keep a step or two ahead of them."

"You were there!" repeated Geraldi.

He fixed his keen glance on Edgar and smiled in a peculiarly mirthless manner.

Something seemed to be swelling inside the fat man. It reached his throat, which worked violently. It reached his face, and he became a violent crimson.

"I was there," said he, rather hoarsely.

The delicate fingers of Geraldi tapped the table again.

"Ah, well," said he, "you may be square with me, nevertheless! Did you intend all along to double cross them, Edgar?"

"You'd be above that kind of thing, of course," said Edgar, half scoffing, half humiliated. "Well, two parts are bigger and fatter than five. Yes, I was with them, and I quit them—when I had a glimpse of you! I said to myself that so much talent would simply serve to clog the wheels of the machine. Now, Jimmy, you know everything. Are you with me, or are you not?"

"I'm with you," said Geraldi.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

NOON found the dining room at the hotel in San Felice more or less deserted, though Geraldi was faithfully there. The others were scattered far and wide in the pursuit of all manner of occupations. But at night the same crowd was assembled, but even denser, so that some of the unlucky ones had to wait for a second table.

Miss Ingall, finishing well before her father, got up and left to give room to one of the hungry. And Robert Ingall looked after her with a vague hesitancy, almost as though he thought it might be better if he should follow her at once. But he settled back in his chair.

"Hey, you!" said a voice beside Geraldi. "You're fiddlin'. You ain't eatin'. Lemme have your place pretty pronto, will you?"

This insulting request was met by Geraldi's accustomed courtesy. He finished his tea, stood up at once, and went from the room.

There was the rude beginning of a garden beside the hotel—a few plots of grass of the raggedest nature, and some groups of stubbed rose bushes. Through this, Geraldi walked quietly to and fro. He strolled with his stick and his cigarette, wandering to the front of the garden and glancing idly up and down the street, or again to the rear of the hotel, where a negro and a Mexican were loading a large wagon with the débris of a shed which had been knocked down by a windstorm not many days before. Geraldi paused and chatted with the two, or tried to chat, but they did not take kindly to his words and answered him with grunts. The negro even went so far as to declare loudly: "They's some that is and they's some that isn't, but mostly it don't make no difference. You can't dress up pore white trash without the trash lookin' through!"

Geraldi, as though this had no meaning for him, wandered away and returned again as two men carried out from the house a long box, rudely made of unplaned pine boards.

"We got some more junk for you here," they said.

"Well, well," said Geraldi, as the two went past him. "What can all that rubbish be?"

"Rag and iron scraps, an' such," said the rearmost of the bearers.

Like a typical idler, attracted by all small things, Geraldi followed. The two men put down the box and puffed a moment.

"This'll about give you a load, Sam," said one of them. "Suppose we hoist this aboard and away with you?"

"Sure," said Sam, the negro.

"But," observed Geraldi, "surely your wagon is only about half loaded?"

"And what business is it of yours?" asked one of the four. "You ain't gotta pull it, do you?"

Geraldi tapped the box with his stick.

"Very big," said he, "big enough, I should even say, to hold a man—or a woman!"

The negro whirled on him, the whites of his eyes glinting dangerously.

"What you talkin' about, white man?" he asked.

"I?" said Geraldi. "Is there any harm, my dear man, in saying that this is a big box?"

"Harm?" echoed Sam. "I'm gonna knock the head right offn your shoulders if you don't get out of here!"

"Come, come," said Geraldi. "After all, what I said is true. It *is* big enough for a man. Suppose I peek in through the crack at that lot of scrap iron and rags, and such!"

The reply of Sam was delivered without words. He drew back his massive right hand, made it into a fist, and shot it straight at the head of Geraldi.

Geraldi cried out loudly with terror; his voice rang piercing far and wide as he shouted for help, and shrank from the blow. The massive fist and arm shot over his shoulder, and at the same time, the big negro crashed against him, their legs entangled, and they pitched to the ground. But odd chance, as it were, put Geraldi uppermost, his elbow striking the back of Sam's neck. The black man lay without a quiver.

"Kill him, kill him!" snarled one of the three, and they came at Geraldi with a rush as he yelled again for help and scrambled to his feet.

They were too close for him to flee. And, at any rate, springing to his feet he suddenly appeared to lose his balance and toppled straight at the knees of the two foremost. They went over him with a lurch, while the fourth of the party stayed his rush and struck savagely at Geraldi's head with a billet of wood which he had picked up.

Chance, as it seemed, saved Geraldi

again, for he writhed to his knees in time to swerve from the descending blow. He had kept his hold on his walking stick all this time, and now, with a more frantic cry for help, he thrust the bone-shod point of the cane into the face of the other. He of the club went backwards, groaning, clutching at his eyes, and Geraldi sprang up in time to see a knot of hurrying men running toward them—from the hotel. But there was danger of a different sort now. One of the two who had tripped over him was up with a gun in his hand.

"You're gonna see death!" said he, and fired point-blank.

The yell of Geraldi was in itself enough to have spoiled the aim of that weapon, but in the confusion of his terror, the cane had spun around in his hand, and as the gunman spoke, Geraldi struck out in instinctive self-defense.

Just across the wrist of the other's gun hand that lucky blow descended. The bullet hummed harmlessly far away, and the other grasped a broken hand.

"We're done! Cut and run for it!" said the fourth of the crew, and instantly bolted, with his companions at his heels. The negro alone lay prone and helpless as the crowd of rescuers arrived.

Half of them remained on the scene of action; the rest sprinted away after the fugitives.

"It was about the box," said Geraldi, mopping his face with a snowy handkerchief. "I said it was big enough to hold a man. It made them very angry. They almost killed me. I don't know why I'm not dead! Thank Heaven that so many brave men were near enough to hear me! I'm going to faint, I think! Has any one a little brandy, please?"

"I seen it out of the back window," said one man. "They jumped this bird." He added: "He was scared to death! They broke themselves up stumblin' over him! What's in that box, anyway?"

They tore away the upper boards. Then they lifted out the body of pretty Mary Ingall, tied hand and foot, and thoroughly gagged, but her eyes bright with life, and angry life at that!

CHAPTER VI.

THE NERVES OF MR. WILBUR.

GERALDI went to the bar of the hotel. He sat on a box in a corner and visibly trembled. His handkerchief was in one hand, continually dabbing at his forehead. In the other hand was a glass of whisky which he sipped. He was apparently totally unnerved.

"Why don't you swaller that off?" asked one of the curious crowd.

"This? But it's like fire, you know," said Geraldi. "And besides, strong liquor upsets me terribly—except just a thimbleful of old cognac!"

"Except a thimbleful of what?" roared one.

"Old cognac! Old grandmother!" they shouted at Geraldi, and burst into enormous, unquenchable laughter. He amused them hugely.

"You're all so rough!" said Geraldi, admiring them with wonder. "So rough and strong! I've never seen such men! Thank Heaven so many of you were near when I was in such deadly peril!"

"Listen to him!" snarled a disgusted voice. "All full of himself, ain't he? Never a word about what might've happened to the girl!"

Some one tapped Geraldi on the shoulder.

"Mr. Ingall wants to know, will you step up to his room for a minute?"

"To-night? I'm so terribly shaken!" said Geraldi. "I really couldn't see any one. I really couldn't!"

"Aw, rats!" said the messenger. "Don't be such a baby. He ain't gonna

eat you! The old boy simply wants to thank you. Come along and see him, will you?"

He dragged Geraldi to his feet, and led him faintly protesting through the door, while a fresh shout of laughter broke behind them.

To the second floor they mounted, and then the guide tapped at a door and pushed it open without waiting for an invitation.

"I got him here for you," he said, and thrust Geraldi into the room.

The door closed. Geraldi leaned against it, bowing and shuddering, like one trying to be polite, and overcome with nerves.

He was Archibald Wilbur, he said. Usually people called him Archie! And he laughed in a thin, foolish cackle.

The girl, in the farther corner of the room, bit her lip to keep back her contempt. But still her stern humor showed itself in her eyes.

Robert Christy Ingall led Geraldi to a chair and pressed him into it.

"Frightfully upset," said Geraldi. "Every nerve is broken and jangling. Hideous experience for me, Mr. Ingall. Simply hideous. But thank Heaven the hotel was so near! The men heard! The brave men! Rough people, but kind, Mr. Ingall! They saved my life!"

"I rather thought from what I heard," said Robert Ingall, "that the crowd simply had saved the lives of the four scoundrels! They've got three of them, now."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Geraldi. "How exciting! How terrible! The villains! I hope they'll be punished!"

"I think they will be," said Ingall in his slow voice, for always he seemed to be thinking his way from word to word, speaking the simplest sentence as though he had to search for some means of expressing his thoughts more clearly.

"One got away," said Ingall. "The negro is still rather helpless because of the force with which you struck him down. One fellow had a damaged eye and cut forehead. Another had a broken wrist where you tapped him—with your loaded walking stick! And, take it all together, I should say it was pretty lucky for the four that the crowd arrived before you'd beaten them to a pulp!"

"Oh!" said Mary Ingall, and drew a little closer.

It seemed a new viewpoint to her.

"You're joking, of course," said Geraldi, with a high-pitched, nervous laugh. "I don't really remember anything! Except the first terrible moment when the negro struck at me and we fell to the ground. I think my elbow must have come down on the back of his neck. He went limp—suddenly and horribly. Like death! Then as I tried to get to my feet, two of them fell over me, and a fourth man struck brutally at me—I hit out at him. Dear me! I don't want to think of it! And then the revolver. I knew that the bullet had gone through me! I—I——"

He closed his eyes and lay back in his chair.

"Have you—have you——"

"Brandy?" asked Mr. Ingall.

"Oh, no! I'd much prefer smelling salts!"

"We haven't any," said Mary Ingall. "But—I could offer you some sal volatile, if you wish?"

Her voice was controlled. She kept the scorn from it. But she could not force any real warmth of kindness into her words.

"Perhaps I'll soon be better," said Geraldi, "if I don't have to think of that dreadful affair. You—poor, dear Miss Ingall! How you must have suffered! How frightfully brave of you!"

"Brave of me to be grabbed and gagged and slapped into a box?" she echoed, rather angrily. "I was a blind ninny, that was all!"

She even stamped a little, as though she promised herself that such a thing never would happen again.

"But," she said, "I don't think that either of us have said a single word of thanks to you——"

"I'd rather that you didn't!" said Geraldi. "Oh, I'd so much rather forget everything! I'd so much rather that it were all put away from our talk. You understand? Otherwise, I really couldn't bear up! I should faint, I think!"

She had to turn her head away toward the window, all flushed with the rose of sunset, now.

But Ingall said: "I'm sorry, Mr. Wilbur. I don't want to wear out your nerves, but I must tell you how deeply I appreciate what you have done. I would like to speak a little, too, about the extraordinary coincidences which seem to have taken place during that battle royal!"

"Dear Mr. Ingall!" cried Geraldi. "You make me tremble! You're not going to talk about it any more, I beg?"

"I was thinking, in the first place, what a rare set of coincidences took place in the very beginning. It was odd—but I won't remark on it—that you stayed there to meet that danger instead of running away from it as you could easily have done. Because, obviously, what they wanted was to get my daughter away, not to harm you!"

"I was so stunned with horror and terror! If you had seen the dreadful face of that black—creature!" said Geraldi.

He covered his face with his hands.

The deep, grave voice of the other went on.

"I understand. It must have been a rough moment. But then the coincidences begin. He strikes at you and misses completely. Odd point number one. He rushes in on you and you become entangled with him so that you *both* fall. Odd point number two! In falling, you actually land on top of him, which is the oddest point of all! And, finally, for the fourth coincidence, you happen to so fall that your elbow lands on his spinal column and nearly kills him—a trick the Japanese understand perfectly. Have you ever been in Japan, Mr. Wilbur?"

"Beautiful Japan," said Geraldi, clasping his hands together as though he were adoring a distant vision. "Let us talk about Japan! Will you talk with me about Japan, Mr. Ingall?"

"I should be happy," said Ingall, "to talk to you about anything. But I have a rather analytical mind, and, if you don't object, I'd like to ramble on a bit about these coincidences. Will you keep track of them, Mary, my dear? I think that I've added up four, at this time?"

Mary, a frown of wonder on her brow, looked keenly at her father, keenly at Geraldi. The latter rose in haste.

"Really, dear Mr. Ingall," said he, "if you're going to persist—I don't want to be rude—I should shudder at the thought of being rude to a gentleman—any gentleman—but one older than I—I should shudder at such a thought! But I must withdraw. I beg you to forgive me! I simply haven't the nerves—I—I——"

He backed toward the door, making apologetic gestures.

"My dear fellow," said Ingall, "if my nerves were half as good as yours, I'd be the happiest man in the world!"

Geraldi seized the knob of the door.

"You're pleased to scoff a little—you're pleased to make a little jest about me. You really are! But I don't mind. Good evening, Mr. Ingall. Good evening, dear Miss Ingall. I hope that you'll recover perfectly from the frightful shock——"

"Good night, Mr Wilbur," said the girl.

"My dear Wilbur," said Ingall, "you

act beautifully. You do, in fact, act the part so well that if I didn't know, I'd be entirely deceived. Good night if you wish!"

Geraldi paused, his hand on the knob of the door, which he had half opened.

At last, he closed it softly and came back into the center of the room. He had cast the odd mannerisms of Mr. Wilbur over his shoulder, as it were.

"You're a keen fellow," said Geraldi. "An old fox, I dare say, will usually catch a young one if he cares to!"

Ingall put out his hand.

"I don't think we really met before, did we?" said he.

"I don't think we did," said Geraldi.

Strong as steel, their grips met, They stepped back a little from one another.

"And I," said Mary, with an embarrassed laugh, "was completely taken in! I've been an idiot. *I* want to begin over at the beginning and thank you in a new way, Mr. Wilbur!"

"Or does that name," said Ingall pleasantly, "go into the discard as well?"

Geraldi glanced at him again. His meaning was clear enough, and Geraldi shrugged his shoulders.

"That name will do as well as another," said he. "Shall we all sit down again?"

CHAPTER VII.

FRANKNESS ON BOTH SIDES.

THEY sat down, Ingall with a faint smile, on account of his triumph; Geraldi rather with a gesture of surrender; and the girl gingerly, on the edge of a chair, as though her mind was still full of thought.

"But," she said finally, "do you see what it means, father? He attacked—deliberately—four men—four armed ruffians!"

"With a walking stick," replied Ingall. "He used that stick first as a sword to stab one of the brutes in the face; then he used it as a club to break a hand."

"But," cried the girl, "but, father you——"

"We owe him everything," said Ingall. "Is that what you mean?"

She stared at Geraldi as though still she were computing and could not arrive at a satisfactory sum total.

"Let's forget it all and drop it," he suggested.

"But I can't do that," said Ingall.

"I think you'd better," murmured the girl to her father. "Talking doesn't do any good!"

And she continued to look at Geraldi in that half-frightened manner. He, despite nerves of copper, began to grow a little uncomfortable.

Finally he said "I want to be honest about this thing. I don't want you to think that I was simply altruistic."

"Will you have a cigar?" asked Ingall. "Don't explain anything, my dear Wilbur. We'll chat of something else since you wish us to."

"But what *did* make you do such a —a terrible thing?" asked the girl.

Geraldi said gently: "I have a pair of motives for most things—I like excitement, and I like money."

Now, although he said this in the quietest manner, her head jerked a little higher and rich color began to go up her cheeks.

"Look here, my friend," said Ingall, "I'm afraid that you're going to make a confession to us. I don't want to drive you into a corner, like that!"

"Of course you don't," smiled Geraldi.

"Perhaps I'd better go," suggested Mary Ingall, rising.

Geraldi stood up in turn.

"You'd better stay here," he returned. "You'd better stay to hear the warning—or challenge, I may call it!"

At this word, their attitude changed a trifle.

Geraldi, in the meantime, went on: "I am what you may call a gold digger. Or perhaps you don't use that slang."

"I understand you," said the girl. "But what sort of a gold digger? Some of them sell mines that are not, and some sell lots in cities in the sky!"

"I don't do those things," answered Geraldi modestly. "I have—no talent in those directions. I am simply a professional gambler. I may say with pride," he added, "that I have done a few efficient jobs cracking safes, and that I've held up a train or two for variety. Gambling, however, is my long suit, and in addition, any sort of adventure which promises excitement and cash—or excitement, sometimes, even without the cash."

"We understand you," replied the man of science. "I've always rather envied that sort of a life."

"Have you?" asked Geraldi.

He looked with respect and also with amused curiosity at Ingall. The silver hair seemed absurdly out of place above such a tanned, healthy face. It was the face of a man who has just come into his intellectual prime, fit for a battle of wits—fit, also, for a battle of hands! It was a decided contrast to the beautiful face of Geraldi; it seemed that Ingall had been roughed out of strong stone. There was a granite hardness and immovability about him. His very smile was different from the smiles of other men. It was very like the archaic look of half-mocking and half-cruel mirth which the old sculptors of Egypt gave to their basalt gods and granite Pharaohs.

"I always have envied it," said Ingall. "The servant of society is, after all, a slave. All democrats love freedom, eh?"

"I don't think," said Geraldi, "that you would ever spend time to make dice or cards perform for you?"

At this, Ingall did not change his expression, but the girl opened her eyes wide.

"I've had to give you a few keynotes with regard to myself," said Geraldi, "because I don't like to pose as a modest hero. When I guessed what was in that box, I did the rest for selfish reasons."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Ingall.

"Very well. I'll be explicit. Suppose that the four had taken your daughter away. To-morrow, rather early, you would receive information that she is safely held; that no money is wanted for her ransom, but that she will be returned to you unharmed if you will give for her a little box, encrusted with gold and——"

He paused. Both Ingall and his daughter were on their feet, watching him.

"You understand?" said Geraldi. "I didn't want to risk the loss of that box; I have designs upon it myself!"

The answer astonished him more than anything he ever had heard in his life, or anything he ever had seen.

"I can follow that train of reasoning," said Ingall. "But there's a flaw in it. And if you're in touch with the cowardly scoundrels who tried to take Mary away, you may let them know that if I had ten boys and girls and they abducted them all, I never would surrender the box—in exchange for them all!"

Geraldi could only look at the floor. He heard, but he could not believe.

"You've been wonderfully frank with me, Mr. Wilbur. You see that I am frank, also. Partly because I want to protect Mary—I want to point out to you that no one can reach the box by striking at her!"

"I have to believe you," said Geraldi, and he could not keep a little stiffness out of his manner, a hard ring out of his voice.

"We'd better talk of something else," said Mary Ingall, her voice strained.

"I have to give Mr. Wilbur as com-

plete a warning as he has given me," said the father. "You aren't the first. As you know, others are trying to take the box. Others have tried in the past. They have only failed. They always will fail. No man or men on earth possibly can take it."

"I know," said Geraldi, "that you have a pair of detectives to help you. But 'impossible' is a large word, sir!"

"Of course it is," said Ingall. "But let me tell you that many men have died in these attempts, Wilbur. More will die in the future, and I"—here he slowly stretched out one hand as though the truth were written on the palm of it in flaming letters—"and I have remained unscathed—and I shall remain unscathed in the future!"

"This is absolute knowledge, of course?" queried Geraldi.

"Absolute, young man! Nothing could persuade me to deceive you."

"And nothing," said Geraldi, "could make me more set on trying to take the box."

He went on to explain: "I have a right to give you one more opening. I've never troubled honest men, Mr. Ingall. If you can explain that you have a right to this box——"

"Ah, but I have, I have!" cried Ingall.

"A legal right?" asked Geraldi. "An actual, legal right?"

Ingall raised a forefinger as though calling down a superior witness.

"My friend," said he, "there are higher rights than legal ones!"

"Are there?" answered Geraldi, carelessly. "At any rate, you don't really claim that the box is yours?"

"It is!" cried Mary Ingall.

"Mary, Mary!" said her father. "Don't let him be deceived. No, in your sense, it doesn't belong to me. This odd scruple of yours," he added, "need trouble you no longer. The box is an open prize—and Heaven have mercy on the souls of those who try to take it! Mr. Wilbur, I've warned you frankly, sincerely!"

He said this with an inexpressible gravity; and Mary Ingall slipped back into a chair, dropped her head on her folded arms, and began to weep softly.

Geraldi cast one glance at her, rose and bowed to Ingall, and offered his hand.

The latter took it without hesitation.

"What we've talked over is a secret to the rest of the world, so far as I am concerned," said Geraldi.

"Thank you. Of course, what you've explained to me is an absolute secret, likewise."

"In the meantime, look to everything with great caution, Mr. Ingall. Examine your locks; I'm an expert in reading the mind of a lock. Look to your doors and windows, I don't make a great deal of sound when I come. I am proud to say that I have had a good deal of experience in all this sort of thing. You need not be afraid of a shot in the back, however, or a knife in your throat at midnight. I don't use those methods!"

"Thank you," said Ingall. "I appreciate everything you say. In exchange for that warning, listen to mine. If night or day I see a suspicious shadow near me, hear a suspicious sound, I'll send a bullet to probe the secret before I come myself. And I shoot straight, Mr. Wilbur, though you may not have known it!"

"I know it perfectly. We are all agreed. We are all in the open. I think that this makes a fair fight of it, sir?"

"Entirely," said Ingall.

He looked upon Wilbur with a sudden compassion in his eyes: "Ah, young man," he murmured, "think again before you undertake this work. Because, if you persist in it, as surely as there are powers in heaven, you are a dead man!"

He said it with a terrible ring of con-

viction; there was a hopeless belief in his face.

Geraldi bade them good night, and he went to his own room.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLANS.

HIS room, by a really odd freak of chance, was just above that of Ingall, and as Geraldi stepped inside the door, he was amazed to see fat Edgar on his knees, drawing up something through a crack of the floor on the farther side of the chamber.

"You oily scoundrel," said Geraldi conversationally.

Edgar, before answering, brought up a small, flat disk through the floor and then rose to his feet and began to coil some lengths of very thin, supple wire.

"You've been listening in," said Geraldi, with a nod of understanding.

"Couldn't help doing that! You have advanced ways, Jimmy. You might be several strides ahead of me in almost no time. Look at yourself now! A hero in a minute!"

He chuckled, and having finished rolling up the coil of wire, he began to rub his thick, soft hands together—a favorite gesture with him.

"A hero," said Edgar, making his voice unctuous and musical. "One moment the shy and trembling youth; the next the tiger at work. But how those four would have gone with wings, if they could have guessed that it was really Geraldi who was up against them! You let one pull a gun, That was foolish!"

"Not a bit," said Geraldi. "As long as I made a farce of it, only the hottest of the lot took to his Colt. If the four had seen me draw—well, I might have handled a pair of them, but the other two would have shot me to pieces. I took the safest way, by all odds."

"Safe?" said the fat man. "Safe as a lion in a tiger's den. But let it go! I've stopped wondering at you, Jimmy. Gradually I begin to understand. The flame eats the tree because it loves the wood, and the sap also!"

He continued.

"I'm going downstairs and out for a little walk. If you happened to go down the same way—through the garden and into the vacant lots beyond it you——"

Geraldi nodded, and his fat ally left the room at once with a quick, bold step —that caused not the slightest sound, nor so much as made the thin, pine flooring quiver.

Then Geraldi turned out the lamp and sat in blackness before his window and watched the treetops tipping back and forth across the stars. San Felice was still, or else there were those distant, single noises which make night more profoundly silent—the bark of a dog, a far-off, dying laughter. So Geraldi looked out upon the world and tasted his life and said that it was good. And he promised himself that of all the antagonists he ever had encountered in the four quarters of the world, none would be more terrible in the proof than this same Ingall, with his strong, cold, cruel face.

He thought little of the girl. She had looked at him with eyes as straight as the eyes of a man. But he could not fit her into the picture. She disturbed him in only one way. Why had she begun that stifled weeping? What had been said or done to break down her self-control?

However, Geraldi remembered that women are fragile creatures, heroically strong for a single instant, then collapsing. And he put down her weakness to her adventure of that day. It might, indeed, have undone an older and a stronger woman than Mary Ingall!

After what seemed a sufficient interval, he determined to follow his fat companion, but he chose a unique mode of descent.

Arm's length from his window a drainage pipe ran down the house from the eaves above. He gripped it, tried its strength, and found the pipe to be iron, and well fastened.

So he swung himself out from his window and went rapidly down, holding by his arms only. A sailor would have been proud of such a feat!

He went past the window of Ingall and heard the steady voice of the man reading aloud. He even heard the clicking of knitting needles, and the domestic picture flashed clearly before the mind's eye of Geraldi.

Then he reached the ground, dusted his hands, and looked up the sheer wall with a nod of satisfaction. It was always well, in his experience, to have unexpected means of exit and entrance!

He crossed the garden and found Edgar in the first lot beyond, pacing through a little grove of pines. They did not talk at any length.

"What did you make of them?" asked Edgar.

"He's a man," said Geraldi.

"I thought so," sighed Edgar. "I almost knew it. But I wanted to have you pass on him. A brain, eh?"

"And a pair of hands, too. He's a lion, Edgar."

"He is?"

"There's no doubt of it. He's one in ten thousand."

"And the girl, then?"

"She'd make a secretary—or a wife," said Geraldi.

"She cried. Wasn't that sobbing I heard?"

"Yes. She blubbered a little."

"What made her do that?"

"She's been trapped, caught, and boxed, and almost sent away," said Geraldi. "Enough to break down any girl, I should say."

"Was that it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I took it that her father has some mystery up his sleeve?"

"I'll tell you," said Geraldi, "when a a man has won out half a dozen times, he begins to feel that he's invincible. Haven't you noticed that?"

"D'you think that explains his attitude?"

"Well enough. Don't you?"

"Not a scrap!" said the other surprisingly.

"Let me have your theory, then."

"I tell you, Jimmy," said the fat man, "that Ingall is not an ordinary man."

"I've said so, also."

"But I mean he's extraordinary in an extraordinary way."

"Go on, Edgar. Talk out!"

"He has been touched in the brain. I'm sure of that. And what he depends upon to protect him and the box is a mystery of the first water."

"It will need to be," said Geraldi grimly. "I intend to have that box in my hands before another twenty-four hours, old fellow!"

"Good!" sighed Edgar. "I like to hear you talk like that! But I doubt it, rather. Unless, as a matter of fact, Ingall is really cracked."

"He has the straightest, coldest eye in the world, man!"

"But you see, Jimmy, that just after he made his profession of faith, the girl broke down and cried."

"I've explained that."

"A dashed silly explanation," said Edgar with conviction. "She went through that abduction like an actress on the stage. Steady as a rock! Still was steady when you came into their room. I heard her voice. Not a quiver in it. Perfectly natural. Perfectly at ease. I'll tell you what, Jimmy, it needed an extra special shock to down her, and that shock was furnished by her father!"

"So?" said Geraldi

He lighted a cigarette. Edgar said not another word until that cigarette was half finished.

"The point is," said Edgar, "that her

father's belief in mysterious protection is his weak point, and the girl well knows it. That's why she began to cry."

"You're simply guessing," said Geraldi.

"But I'm guessing a mile closer to the truth than you are!"

"Perhaps you're right," said Geraldi. "I'm more willing to go on your idea than on mine!"

"Jimmy," said the other, "I thank you for being humble. It may help us to win the game. What have you in mind for the next move?"

"To get a pair of first-class horses."

"They're already got."

"I mean, one of them will have to pack your tub of fat at a good gallop and keep it up."

"I have," said Edgar, "a half-bred, one quarter common range cayuse, and one quarter distilled essence of deviltry. She'll carry even me."

"And for James Geraldi?"

"I have a long-drawn-out, lump-headed, slab-sided brute with the sweetest set of legs that you ever saw in action."

"You know those horses, Edgar?"

"I know them, my dear, like the inside of a book!"

"Then there's one half of the job done."

"What's the other half, Jimmy?"

"The taking of the box."

"To-night?"

"To-night, of course."

"Very well, Jimmy. I'm under orders. How's it to be done?"

"*Amigo mio,* it's to be done very simply."

"I wait to learn."

"The room of the girl is beside her father's room?"

"Yes."

"In the middle of the night, you open her door with a key—I'll provide the key in the meantime."

"I have one, thank you," said Edgar.

"My dear fellow," said Geraldi, "how foresighted you are! It's a pleasure to work with you."

"But," said the fat man, "I don't like this business of going into a girl's room at night."

"Does it shock you, Edgar?"

"They lynch you on the double quick, in this part of the world, for even lifting an eyebrow at a girl!"

"You can take my part of the job, then. Sit on the drain pipe outside of Ingall's window. When you make a noise and the girl yells for help——"

"Great Scott, Jimmy, do I have to wake her up!"

Geraldi laughed.

"Then, old boy, when you get a whoop out of her, you back out of that room on the double and—lock the door behind you. That yell of hers will bring her father like a tiger out of his room. As he passes through the door, I enter via the window, lock him into his daughter's room, and begin to search *his* room——"

"Ah, Jimmy," said the fat man, "what a child I am in these matters. I'll begin to learn at your knee!"

CHAPTER IX.

SUCCESS.

MAN is not made to hang for a long time from a branch, and Geraldi's wrists were aching before he had been many minutes clinging to the pipe which ran down the side of the house. It seemed to him that fat Edgar surely must have had ample time to work the key into the lock; and then it came into his mind that the fat man might have decided to betray him, and take all the profits of the occasion with a lesser partner, who would be contented with a fixed sum of hard cash rather than a portion of the entire profit. There was another danger—if that grim fellow Ingall, looked out from his window and saw a man wedged against the wall

beside it, it would be very odd if he did not try a snap shot at the night intruder!

So Geraldi's time spent clinging to the pipe was by no means pleasant. Then he thought he heard the faintest of creaks, as though hinges were being turned cautiously. Immediately afterward there was a loud cry—a woman's voice!

In Ingall's room, springs squeaked, bare feet pounded down upon the floor, and Geraldi heard Ingall's voice calling "Steady, Mary! I'm coming."

He did not wait for any further signal, but swung himself boldly through the window and landed catlike on the floor. A door slammed, a key screeched in a lock, a match spurted dim flame in the girl's chamber.

Then Geraldi reached the door, closed it with a motion both swift and soft, and heard Mary exclaiming: "I saw some one in the darkness. I saw some one. A hand touched my face. I wasn't dreaming. Try the hall door!"

Geraldi had heard enough. He went to his work, torch in one hand and the other rapidly reaching here and there. A gesture whipped the clothes from the bed and flung them in a corner. Another turned over the mattress—a mattress thick enough, perhaps, to contain the box. But a deft exploration showed that the mattress was undisturbed. Now he paused, flashing the light from point to point, trying to make his mind jump to some conclusion.

Above him, below him, feet were beginning to beat on the floors tardily in answer to the shouts of Ingall. Ingall himself, apparently unaware that the door to his own room had been closed and locked, was giving his shoulder to the one which led from the girl's chamber to the hall, and every thrust of his weight sent a crash through the building.

There was a tall chest of drawers in the room. Geraldi decided on that and wrenched the bottom drawer open; then the top. There was nothing in the lower drawer; there was nothing other than a few clean shirts neatly folded in the top drawer.

He tipped the entire chest to and fro, swaying its ponderous and clumsy weight with wonderful ease, but he heard no heavy object sliding back and forth.

He left the chest of drawers just as a heavy body lurched against the hall door of the room. Then another shock. More men than one had gathered there to break it down. But Geraldi knew that door. He had examined it with more than passing care that same evening, and noted that the wood was seasoned and tough. Also, the thoughtful Ingall had reënforced the door with a strong bolt of his own construction.

So Geraldi let the door be, for the moment, and flashed his light over the walls. It seemed to him that one board projected a little beyond the others——

Miraculously he gained a finger hold and ripped out that board as though it were the thinnest of cardboard.

A fine mortar dust swept into his face. Nothing else was revealed!

Then he turned back to the room itself and thought of the two big suit cases in the corner. But they were a little too obvious. Grimly he returned to the chest of drawers, while a man gave his shoulder to the door leading to Mary Ingall's chamber and made it buckle and groan with the impact. Geraldi whipped out a blue-nosed Colt and split the top panel of that door with a snap shot. He heard an exclamation of surprise and anger.

That would teach them a little caution, at least! But the whole place was a buzzing hornet's nest, by this time. He knew that he had only seconds, and he jerked open the drawers one by one, letting them crash upon the floor as he swept a hand through the contents of each.

The last one of all! And if that failed, he knew that he dared not spend another moment in the search. The last one of all. And behold!—under a loosely folded linen coat was a box of perhaps eight or nine inches square—heavy—flashing with gold, and the torch light was flared back at him from a great, blue-green emerald!

He was at the window in an instant.

A torrent of noise flowed up and down the hall, beat and roared through the girl's chamber. But had there been time for one of the keen-witted to get outside the house and watch the window from beneath?

All below him was dark and thick before his eyes, so recently dazzled by the light of his own torch. He climbed onto the window sill, and dropped down shoulder-deep. The box was between his legs, as his right hand came in contact with the drain pipe, and while he swung over to his narrow ladder of escape, he heard a door go down with a huge rending of wood, a mighty crash against the floor. They had rushed in from the hallway, he could tell, probably four or five men taking the door at one charge.

He, in the meantime, went down the pipe so fast that his hands burned with the friction. He did not even venture a glance beneath him, but kept his eye fixed upon the window above. A light darted out from it, wavered, and fixed itself suddenly upon him.

Geraldi did not hesitate. How far he was from the ground he could not tell, but behind that light he guessed at the keen eye and the sure hand of Ingall. Therefore, he thrust himself out from the wall with one hand, caught the box from between his knees with the other, and dropped.

A gun coughed. He felt the nip of a large-caliber bullet before his very eyes; never had good aim been baffled by so small a margin!

He landed lightly, whirled, and ran at full speed straight down the side of the house as two men lumbered around the corner, guns in hands. The light licked down at him again like a long tongue. Two hasty reports over his head—but Ingall had perhaps found it difficult to get in a good position. He would have had to turn in the window and fire with his left hand, perhaps. At any rate, neither of those two bullets came close to him, and he swerved away to the left as the pair before him shouted and threw up their weapons.

He was in the brush before they fired, and as he heard the slugs cutting with a rattle through the small branches above his head, he knew that he was safe! And the treasure in his hands! And all had been done on the very day when he had warned the enemy!

It was hardly wonderful if Geraldi laughed a little as he ran, swinging in and out among the crowding trees. He made straight for the far angle of the garden, and there, dim among the shadows, he found two horses, with a bulky form in one saddle, the other saddle empty. Catlike, Geraldi sprang up.

There was a convenient sack attached to the saddle bow and into this he dropped the box and got the horse under way with the pressure of his heels. They made straight at the fence, Edgar leading the way. No need for jumping. The fat man's foresight had cut away the dangerous barbed wire between two of the posts and they whisked away into the muffling, thick sand of the street, twisting at once to the right down an alley.

People were coming out from their houses; doors were slamming, windows crashing open, and Geraldi tipped to the side.

"Carry straight ahead, man!" he called. "They'll spot two men riding together, otherwise, and follow us by that. Go on east of the town—to that hill where I saw Ingall. I'll follow around by a different route."

He half expected that Edgar, now that the prize was won, would be apt to do anything rather than leave the vicinity of the jewels, but instead of protesting, the fat man waved his hand. Geraldi, therefore, doubled back, crossed the western side of the town; and circled around toward the eastern hill which had been appointed as a rendezvous.

San Felice was awakening with a roar. It was like the explosion of a great bomb, spreading by degrees from place to place, a noise composed of snorting horses, howling and barking of dogs, even the squeal of a pig, and under all the angry, humming of far-off human voices.

A dangerous sound, and yet sweetest music to the ears of Geraldi. He smiled as he listened to it.

His horse had not been praised for nothing. Looked at from above, it seemed more like half a horse than a whole one—half a horse with a double head set on the end of the neck like an apple on the end of a rapier. But, nevertheless, it could gallop and gallop it did, with a long and swinging stride, frictionless, effortless.

Geraldi looked back to the town and saw the spreading arms of it draw together, saw the lights draw back into a single, gleaming point. Then he knew that safety was theirs, for the time at least. The hill jumped up before him, girded beneath with trees, as with heavy mist, and out of those trees a single horseman rode and waited for him. He did not need a herald to tell him it was his companion in crime. The bulging, rounded lines of that rider proclaimed his identity. And, as Geraldi came up, they swung their horses on, side by side, silent, riding with care, but intent on putting a pleasant stretch of miles between them and the pursuit.

A pursuit it would be, too—as Geraldi well could guess from what he knew of Ingall. That astute old warrior, beaten by the simplest of devices, would not give up without a desperate struggle.

"Mountains?" asked Edgar at last, and waved his hand before him.

To the right went up the dark heads of the range. To the left those heights were broken into lower, tumbling hills.

"What good are long-legged horses in mountains?" asked Geraldi, and they aimed their course for the hills.

CHAPTER X.

THE WINK OF STEEL.

IT was four in the morning before they paused. Already the east was lightening, and they had blundered upon an excellent stopping place. A little creek slipped down the side of the hill with a whisper of speed and the light of the day was freshening upon the willows and poplars that stood along the banks. It had been primeval forest, not many years before, but fire had leveled all this section. The huge trunks stood up like ill-made men, reaching distorted arms into the dimness of the morning; but everywhere the second-growth woods had sprung up to a considerable height.

It was the perfect time. In this light, fire could not be seen at any distance, and smoke would be a mere part of the morning mist, so they built their fire without too much precaution and prepared a breakfast. It had been no starvation trip planned for lightest marching order. Each of them had cunningly composed packs which would enable them to present an alteration in their appearance from point to point on their march. And Edgar had seen to it that there was plenty of food and even a coffeepot!"

They finished their breakfast. They finished their coffee, and as Edgar lighted a cigarette he looked up at the rose of the morning, which was blossoming across the sky.

"Well?" said Edgar.

"Suppose we sleep on it?" asked Geraldi.

"We won't sleep much afterward, I'm thinking," said the fat man, and without another word laid himself down on the grass and was instantly snoring. Geraldi imitated that example.

They slept for nearly two hours, calmly and well, and at last Geraldi wakened and found the other sitting up, looking with mild, beneficent eyes upon him.

He had taken from his pack a small guitar—smaller than any Geraldi ever had seen before—and now Edgar began to pluck the strings and sing in a large, rich voice that floated far away among the trees. The water ouzel, which had been darting fearlessly about above and through the spray of a small cataract in the brook, now perched upon a dripping stone on the bank and gave up his own music for a more skillful effort.

Geraldi, leaning on one elbow, listened drowsily, and watched a blue jay perched on the very tip of a small pine tree, looking restlessly about for mischief to perform.

"I suppose it's time," said Geraldi.

"We might as well," answered Edgar.

Geraldi took the saddlebag, therefore, reached into it, and took out for their first examination a treasure so infinitely beyond their expectation that they looked it over in total silence.

It was not merely inlaid with gold. It was heavily incrusted all over, and upon the incrustation a precious enamel had been laid to present certain strange figures. Inside, the box was sheeted with gold again, but this was merely a thin layer. There was nothing within; it was the sheer weight of the metal that had made the box appear to be loaded.

What Geraldi first saw was an enameled man in an enameled boat with high, curving prow and stern; upon his head he wore what looked like branching horns, and between the horns reposed a large disk of green. It was upon that disk that they fastened the greater part of their attention. Edgar even asked to have the box tipped a little more into the light, and with a glass screwed into his eye he searched the green depths with hungry gaze.

At last he raised his head and removed the glass. Geraldi waited in the calm of a very great impatience.

"It's real," said Edgar, and sighed. "It's entirely a perfectly first-class emerald. Goodness knows how many carats in it! I'd be almost ashamed to guess!"

"And here's another side," remarked Geraldi.

He turned up the gorgeous form of a great scarab which rolled before it a huge, green ball that glittered and shimmered in the sunlight.

"My lord! My lord!" sighed the fat man. "Is there one on every side? No wonder Kalam and the rest were after it!"

He applied the same scrutiny to this gem and finally announced: "There's a couple of flaws in it, but away down at the bottom of the heart of it, and that's a deep heart, son! Like the deep, green heart of the sea! Green fire! Green heaven! Ah, Jimmy, life is just beginning for us!"

They turned the third side up and saw what appeared to be a swathed mummy with a white crown, and above the crown arose another of those monstrous gems.

They gave it hardly a glance.

Upon the fourth side another figure walked, hunch-shouldered after the old Egyptian style, and he, in turn, had above his head another emerald no whit inferior to all the rest.

Speechless, they turned up the box, and upon its top they saw a larger figure than any upon the sides, enameled in the form of a man with a

hawk's head above his shoulders—a marvel of cunning workmanship, so that every feather seemed indicated, and the steely sharpness of the formidable beak. Above his head, also, there was an indentation which extended quite to the bottom of the golden sheathing of the box, but that which had filled the hollow no longer was present.

The fat man snatched the box and measured the empty hole, measured again the other jewels which remained.

Then he laid the box upon the sand, where it glowed and flashed as though on fire.

"Young man," he said angrily, "we've been done out of a stone worth all the others put together! Do you hear me, Jimmy? We've lost the head of the whole business. These other gems are simply pikers. That was the real prize! *That,* my boy, was an *emerald!*"

"It might have been a piece of green glass," said Geraldi.

"Don't say it, Jimmy," replied the other. "It does me harm to hear you say such a thing. It really does, Jimmy. Makes my heart ache to think you've no more sympathy and understanding for the rare old boy who planned this bit of jewelry. Green glass? Would he spoil his job by coming down to that note in the scale?"

"He wouldn't," agreed Geraldi. "Because I take it that this is the crowning point of the whole work. This fellow here with the hawk's head, Edgar, is our friend that I was telling you about, that Ingall talks to at sunrise."

"Hours?" asked Edgar.

"Horus," said Geraldi.

"Horus! That's it! Golden Horus—how did the rest of it go?"

"I'd as soon have him in enamel," said Geraldi, "if we could find the thing he used to wear upon his head."

"Good old fellows, they are," said Edgar with beaming sympathy. "Forced to carry around burdens like those, Jimmy. Sad, I call it, and never a word of complaint, I suppose, in the last couple of thousand years!"

"Those are solar disks," said Geraldi. "Bum idea, that, Edgar—green suns, eh?"

"I never saw a better sun in the sky!" said the fat man with energy. "Never saw a better one in all my life—never one to equal the four beauties on the sides of this box. But if we had the top one of all——"

He broke off with a sigh.

Then he stood up and began to remake his pack. Geraldi followed suit. They resaddled the refreshed horses, mounted, and rode down the dip of the hills.

"Which way now?" asked the fat man.

"There's only one way for us," said Geraldi.

"Explain yourself, old son."

"Where are we going to get rid of stones of this size?"

"I won't break them," declared the other. "I'm dashed if I'll have them broken! I'd rather eat them, first!"

"Then," answered Geraldi, "we have to start for the East; take a ship in New York, and slide over to Paris. I know a little, side street with a little black-faced shop in a tumble-down old building. There's a one-eyed rascal running it. He wears a dirty blue apron and keeps his spectacles high up on his forehead except when he looks at a jewel. But he's paid as much as a million and a quarter in hard cash for a single deal."

"I like him already," said Edgar. "There's a man with a good heart!"

"He keeps a son in a palace near Tours. Keeps that lad like a prince."

There was reminiscent shade in his voice.

"I suspect that you played cards with that boy," suggested Edgar.

"He's an ambitious youngster," said Geraldi. "Lucky, too; but he wanted to help his luck out, and therefore he

learned a great deal about cards—you understand? He sat down to a little friendly game, one day, and I happened to be at the table."

"I hope you taught him a little, Jimmy? You wouldn't let a promising young fellow like that waste his time, I hope?"

"He couldn't learn," said Geraldi, "except by himself. And all went perfectly well with him until he made a slight mistake in his own deal—the cards seemed a bit wrong for him, I mean to say——"

"You switched decks on him?" grinned the fat man.

"What a suggestion!" murmured Geraldi, but his eyes were too large and mild and innocent.

The blue jay, which had been perched on the top of the young pine, now came swooping with a harsh outcry just above their heads.

"Dash that bird!" exclaimed Edgar. "I hate the little bright beasts. I always *have* hated them! They're spies, Jimmy!"

The latter made no reply, but after a moment he leaned pleasantly and said to his companion: "Keep your head straight forward, Edgar, and don't look behind you."

"Why not, man?"

"I saw the wink of steel, a second ago."

"Ah?" murmured Edgar, growing a little pale, but setting his jaw firmly beneath its folds of fat.

"I saw it again, a second later. Unless I'm terribly in error, there are about six riders in that bit of woods, Edgar, and they want us!"

CHAPTER XI.

LEGAL AND MORAL RIGHTS.

WHEN they had turned the next point of rocks, they sent their horses down the slope like a mountain river in June flood.

They shot out from the woods. Pleasantly rolling country extended before them, with good footing for the horses and the slopes never too steep for a fine gallop. The enemy came like volleyed arrows behind. There were not six, but seven of them, and they were mounted on excellent horses. There was hardly the slightest difference between their mounts and those of Geraldi and his companion, but what difference there was, was on the side of Edgar's purchases. If only the fat man's mount could bear up under the crushing impost of that tremendous weight!

Ten miles of honest galloping were put behind them, and now the best they could raise from their horses was a trot! But the enemy were dimly bobbing on the horizon.

"Jimmy," said the fat man, "I give you the credit for the whole idea, and the nerve to stay in the fire until you'd picked out what you wanted; but hand me a little credit for the get-away I provided, will you?"

And at that moment, while his head was turned, his fine animal stopped short, and then jerked forward on its head. Edgar, heavily thrown, rolled head over heels and got up staggering in time to see Geraldi send a bullet through the brains of the horse.

Staggering still, but not with the shock of the fall, Edgar came back to his companion. He looked at the country about him, but it was smooth shaven. There was not a rock, there was not a bush, there was not even tall grass in which he could have attempted to hide.

Then he stared at the smoking gun in the hand of Geraldi, and at the thin, handsome face of that youth.

"Get on the horse!" commanded Geraldi. "I'll run alongside!"

Edgar asked no questions. Fear was making his fat sides quake, and he scrambled into the saddle. His first

gesture was to put out his hand to the saddlebag in which the box hung.

"How could they have spotted us?" groaned Edgar.

"By thinking the way we thought. Nothing simpler. Ride, Edgar, old fellow, and we'll try to come to some place where we can fight them off."

Edgar groaned again, and started his horse on at a trot. They slipped between two low hills.

"Shall I swing right up this draw?"

"Keep straight on! Keep straight on!" So commanded Geraldi, trotting lightly at the side of the fat man.

They went up a long, easy rise, and from the top they looked back at seven, shadowy silhouettes streaking toward them from the distant rear.

"They've seen the kill—they've tasted horse blood, they want our blood now," said Geraldi. "Look at that! Those horses, even, have new life. And this nag is a beaten dog!"

He pointed a little to the left.

"You see that knot of rocks and trees? Make that if you can, Edgar, and pray that there'll be water in it! We're going to have a siege even if we land that!"

Edgar made no comment.

They turned straight toward the little oasis of rocks. It stood up for them like a ship at sea—and they, wrecked mariners on the shallowest of barges, with sharks about!

Whip and spur went into the tormented flanks of the horse, with the fat man working hard, and Geraldi running beside, holding to one stirrup. But though Edgar had chosen an excellent animal to carry the lighter weight of Geraldi, it never was meant to support his own poundage. The ten-mile run had taken the heart of the horse. Now it floundered drunkenly across the hills. Geraldi glanced back and took note.

"We can't make it," he panted. "Ride for the foot of the hill, Edgar, and we'll fight them off from behind the horse and try to get up to the rocks, one of us, by a rear movement. Ride, man—ride!"

And Edgar rode indeed. He was badly frightened, but fear did not make him incapable. His mouth set in a hard, straight line that made his cheeks bulge. He had the look of one grinning with pain, but he wasted no time in glancing over his shoulder at those grim riders behind him; he gave all his attention to wringing a little more strength out of that failing, shambling body of the horse, and steering it the straightest way for the hill of refuge.

They were near the foot of the hill, now, and had its long, easy slope before them; but in their ears were the yells of triumph and the beat of many hoofs, when a gun barked straight before them, and then in rapid succession a stream of shots were fired.

Utterly bewildered, Geraldi looked back and saw a horse down and a man rolling on the ground, while the rest of that pursuit split to either side and rode furiously for safety. At that same moment, totally spent, the horse under the fat man halted and dropped its head.

"We're lost and saved," said Edgar bitterly. "And dash the luck that's brought the entire world here to chase us this way and that! We never should have made that camp, Jimmy!"

"We've done nothing wrong," said Geraldi. "You can't beat luck. It always has the top hold!"

They left the horse and went slowly up the slope. No one appeared from behind the rocks that ridged its top, and they had gained the very crest and walked in through the first line of the defense before they could see what garrison was there. Then they found a big, blond cow-puncher, and with him the white head and the stern face of Robert Ingall!

The four looked at one another in half-amused, half-grim expectancy.

It seemed perfectly obvious what had

happened. The gang of Seyf Kalam and the rest had guessed at the direction in which Geraldi would flee; so had Ingall, and showed his self-confidence by taking only one man to join him in the pursuit. Geraldi began to chuckle.

"And why?" asked Ingall.

"Because," said he, "I can't help thinking about the view you had of us when we were scooting across the hills —with those seven fellows brushing us straight into your dust pan, so to speak."

Ingall did not smile.

"I had no doubt whatever," said he. "I knew what would happen."

"You didn't strike out across the hills by guess?"

"My young friend," said Ingall, "I was led!"

The blond cow-puncher put in: "By what, chief?"

"A thing which has no name—for any of you," said Ingall. "I think the box comes back to me, Mr. Wilbur?"

Geraldi had tucked the saddlebag under his elbow; now, for answer, he shrugged his shoulders.

"The box goes back to you?" echoed the fat man. "I don't see that. You've spent more years in the higher education, Mr. Ingall. But I don't follow that idea!"

"We can give you some reasons, maybe!" suggested the big cow-puncher.

He was a handsome fellow, with a face that looked younger than the pale, narrow sabers of his mustache, drooping on either side of his mouth. Now he moved his rifle a little. He carried it slung across the hollow of his left arm, ready at any instant to jerk the butt to his shoulder and cover a man.

But Ingall raised his hand.

"Not a bit of that!" said he. "We're dealing with a gentleman here who will see reason. But if you try force, my boy, he will kill us both out of hand. You don't know him!"

The cow-puncher smiled, and his smile was as stern as arctic cold.

"I dunno," said he. "I take my chances—but you're the doctor here and I do what you say!"

Edgar actually rubbed his fat palms together with satisfaction.

"This is a lot better," he said. "We're going to talk this thing out—reasonably. All you have to do, Mr. Ingall, is to prove that you have a legal right to this saddlebag and what's in it."

Robert Ingall sat down on a flat-topped rock and, taking off his hat, wiped his forehead with a handkerchief and then smoothed his silver hair.

"You might take a walk around the edge of the rocks," said he to the cow-puncher, "and try to make out what those fellows are doing. Then go down and bring up that horse of theirs as soon as it can walk. It will be dead in a few hours unless the stiffness is walked out of it. Here's my glass, so that you can watch the hills."

He gave it in its case to the other, and still the cow-puncher lingered, frowning a little. Never had Geraldi seen a more perfect fighting type, keen as steel, and as cold.

"Let me hang around a little," begged the puncher. "You dunno. I might come in pretty handy up here, chief. You never can tell——"

And he let his glance drift from Geraldi to the fat man, and back again, until his cold, gray eyes steadied upon the smaller of the two and dwelt long upon him. And Geraldi looked back with an odd and baffled feeling that he was mated at last!

Ingall, however, seemed to prize the formidable presence of his hired man not a whit. He merely turned his head to him with a curt nod.

"Take yourself off, my friend," said he. "Look over the hills. See if you can spot those rascals who were riding so hard a little while ago. Then come back with the horse."

The cow-puncher made a gesture of reluctant surrender. Still after he had started off he turned again and gave Geraldi a lingering glance. But finally he was gone from sight.

"Legal right?" said Ingall. "It's true that I have no actual legal right. But I have the moral right."

"Moral right! That's good—that's rich!" said the fat man with a wink to Geraldi. "He has the moral right. You can keep the moral right, Mr. Ingall, and we'll keep the box, thank you!

"Or," he added, "you can have the moral right *and* the box, but we'll hang onto the pretty green stones!"

Ingall looked gravely, almost pityingly, at Edgar.

"Do you mean that you would pry the emeralds out of their settings?" he asked.

"Funny, isn't it?" smiled the other. "It'd be sad to spoil that pretty little box. But you see how it is, Mr. Ingall. I have no eye for art. I'd leave that to you. All the gold, even, and the fine enamel work! We'll simply take the stones and let it go at that!"

Ingall raised a hand with a lessoning forefinger.

"Let me tell you one thing from the bottom of my heart," said he. "Every man who tampers with the jewel work on that box is dead—dead from the day he touches it."

The contented grin of Edgar was somewhat dimmed by this. But he looked in bewilderment at Geraldi, as though wanting a little reënforcement in talking common sense to this strange fellow.

Geraldi seemed to be considering this appeal in some doubt. But at length he reasoned: "It's a very large haul, Mr. Ingall. It's enough to make a man want to overstep the mark a little. But, as a matter of fact, I see that we would have been neatly scooped up by those seven riders if it hadn't been for the rifles on the hill——"

"Great Scott, man!" breathed Edgar. "What are you about to say? Are you going to let them in on a split? If it's a fight, Jimmy, you know that you can count on me to handle this fellow—no matter how many lions he has killed. And as for the puncher—I think you can dispose of him fast enough."

"I know you have plenty of nerve," said Geraldi, at last, coming to a conclusion, "but the fact is that I recognize that moral right Mr. Ingall was speaking of. We gave him a fair challenge; we got the box from him by fair craft and taking of chances; but now I think he's won it back. And here, as a matter of fact, it is!"

And he placed the saddlebag in the hands of Robert Ingall!

CHAPTER XII.

THREE SAD MEN.

TO the fat man it appeared a stunning thing, so that he gaped at Geraldi, and then at the saddlebag which Ingall had opened for a single glance, and then closed, and was tying its mouth once more.

"Jimmy," said Edgar at last, "is it the double cross?"

"It's the square deal," answered Geraldi lightly.

The other started to speak, changed his mind, and went slowly away. His whole body seemed to sag. When he came to the first tree, he halted and leaned a hand against it until he had recovered from the shock. Then he went on with a fumbling step and vague eyes.

Ingall followed him with his glance.

"You've made a sad man, there, Mr. Wilbur," said he.

Geraldi did not answer, and the other went on: "I knew that it would come back to me. But I was curious to see how. And you observe, my young friend, the hand which took it was the hand which returned it!"

He laughed suddenly, and the laughter had an unpleasant ring; the light in the eyes of Ingall, also, was not a thing to be faced if it could be avoided, and Geraldi looked off across the hills.

"Our friends have ducked out of sight," said he, "but I think that they'll be back again. They have their eye on you!"

"Ah, Wilbur," said Ingall, with a sudden change of voice and manner, "I am sorry for them. Just as I was sorry for you when you gave me your challenge yesterday. I admire courage. You all have shown it—wit, invention, grim determination, skill. It was a simple and neat little trick that took the box away last night. I thought for a moment that it would cost you a bullet through the head—but it is all futile. All these efforts to take what is mine are bound to fail. And if they seem to succeed for a moment, it is only that my own faith may be tested," went on Ingall, his voice rising higher and that fanatic ring coming into it once more. "As if I had doubt in my mind! But there is no doubt in me. I have faith. I have seen! I have seen the golden hand of the god!"

Perhaps enough has been said to indicate that Geraldi had as few nerves as most young men, but now, as he heard that strange avowal which hinted at a creed outworn by two milleniums and more, he was slightly startled.

It was not Ingall, oddly enough, that he thought of at that moment. It was Mary, the daughter of this man. Edgar had been right. It was a great deal more than the shock of her own narrow escape that had reduced her to tears the day before!

And, worst of all, it was a thing of which he dared not speak. It was a subject which he shrank from. His own disbelief in everything seemed to weigh upon his mind like the mantle of lead with which Dante cloaked his sinners.

Ingall had risen to his feet and now he walked back and forth with a long, slow stride. His eyes were still uncannily bright, and his glance roved. When it fell upon Geraldi, he had to steady himself to meet it.

"The time is now very near at hand," said the Egyptologist, "when such a revelation will be given to the world as will blast the minds of the weak and the foolish. Only to the chosen the truth will come home like a bird to its nest!"

He paused before Geraldi.

"Young man," said he, "there is metal in you which could see the truth —even if it were as bright as the disk of the noonday sun, let me say!"

Geraldi started.

"Oh," said the other, lifting his solemn hand, "as bright as the sun upon both horizons, the golden sun, like a hawk on both horizons——"

Geraldi stared at him with open dread. And Ingall, seeing that look, mastered himself with an effort that turned him sallow of face.

"There must be time for everything," said Ingall. "We need to take great thoughts slowly, as a child learns to eat new food in small mouthfuls! But when the truth at last comes, there is with it an appetite——"

He ceased speaking, and then added abruptly: "You have been sent to me for a purpose. Let me have a few days or weeks to see what that purpose may be. A purpose of good!"

Geraldi could stand it no longer. He had to change this conversation and he could think of only one topic that would serve his purpose.

"Ingall," said he, "you have picked up a rare fellow in that cow-puncher!"

"He?" said the other carelessly. "He was brought to me. There was a service to be done, and he was brought to me!"

He added in a calmer and more natural tone: "He shoots well, Wilbur."

"Did he drop that horse?"

"It was he. I told him only to fire over their heads, as I was doing, but the temptation was too great for him, it appeared."

"Did you think," asked Geraldi, "that you would stop that charge by firing in the air?"

"I hoped to," said Ingall, in his darker manner. "For why should I wish to take their lives, seeing that their punishment will be greater than they can bear—through all eternity! Through all eternity!"

Very glad was Geraldi to see the cow-puncher coming up the slope, and Edgar beside him, both pulling on the bridle. It was as though Edgar, after the shock which he had received, could not endure mere idleness. He worked with the puncher over the horse, driving it constantly up and down so that it would cool off gradually. But it was in very bad condition, and it persisted in stopping whenever it could and dropping its head down with a shudder.

"That horse will be no good for riding until to-morrow morning," said the big cowboy. "I'll rub him down, but he's fair shaken to bits. He never was cut out to carry a heavyweight, it looks to me!"

He grinned toward Edgar.

"Take him down to the flat," said Ingall suddenly. "Face him toward the sun and keep him there for an hour. Then ride him back here!"

"Ride him back?" asked the other, instinctively glancing down at his powerful body as though wondering how such a burden could be carried.

"Do as I tell you!" said Ingall shortly. "I don't expect you to understand!"

Perhaps his long residence in Egypt had given him a rough carelessness in addressing his inferiors. Now the cow-puncher flushed a little and looked gloomily at his employer, but as though he resigned himself at once, he shrugged his big shoulders and went off down the slope, dragging the dull-eyed horse behind him.

Ingall abruptly turned his back on Geraldi and retired to the shadows among the trees as though he wished to be alone.

"A nut," said Edgar lightly, hooking a thumb over his shoulder. He went on: "Jimmy, it's something deep—it's something grand that you have in mind. Let me in on it. I won't ask too many questions! And you know that I'm with you up to the hilt in this little work!"

"It's nothing up my sleeve," Geraldi assured him. "Not a thing."

"You've simply handed back the stuff to him?"

"I've simply handed it back to him!"

"What right had you to do it?" asked Edgar, now growing suddenly purple, though he kept his voice down. "What extra claim had you to do it?"

"I don't know," answered Geraldi. "Except that you'd be a dead man yonder in the hills, if I hadn't done what I thought was right when your horse dropped. And now I've done what I think is right again. I'll tell you this: I've nothing to gain!"

"And I'm to believe that?" asked the other, his lips curling.

"I hope that you'll believe it."

"I'll be darned if I'll be such a fool!" said he, and walked hastily away, pausing a little now and then as though the fresh ecstasy of his rage overwhelmed and numbed him.

Geraldi, in turn left alone, sat down on a rock and looked at the horse—which the tall cow-puncher was keeping obediently turned toward the sun. The long minutes passed, gloomy minutes for Geraldi, as he contemplated the breakdown of what had once been a brilliant mind, until it had been lost in such superstitious folly as this.

Then he rubbed his eyes and looked again with a new interest.

The broken-down gelding was beginning to crop the grass at his feet!

CHAPTER XIII.

MARVELS.

IT was no single marvel. A sick horse is like a sick dog. It will not eat. Only man seems to retain his appetite when he has no real need of nourishment, but though Geraldi looked on the quick recovery of the gelding as a most astonishing thing, that was not all.

The full hour elapsed and then the cow-puncher did exactly what he had been told to do. He jumped on the back of the horse and spurred it up the slope—and Geraldi stood up and opened his eyes indeed, for the gelding came at a strong gallop.

He stopped the rider at the edge of the rocks. He wanted to know what had happened, what peculiarity of grass, perhaps, grew at the foot of the rocks, but the answer was decisive.

"The same as grows here!" said the big man.

Geraldi shook his head in amazement.

"I thought that was a foundered horse," he said.

"Look at him now," replied the cow-puncher.

The gelding held up his head. His eyes were bright. At that moment a buzzard stooped lower from the sky, though still at a great distance, and the horse lifted its head to follow the movement of the free-gliding shadow in the sky.

"What's your name?" asked Geraldi.

"What business is it of yours?" asked the big man with a ready ferocity.

"Come, come!" answered Geraldi. "Don't be a bulldog! Is your name poison?"

"For some gents!" said the other more fiercely than ever,

"Not for me, I hope," replied Geraldi. "Carry your name along with you, then, and good luck go with it and you!"

He even laughed a little as he spoke, but he felt far less content than he pretended, for there was something unspeakably ominous in the bearing of this man, and Geraldi, looking at him more closely, felt more and more convinced that he was something far beyond the ordinary. It was more than the magic of the dead god that had brought poor Ingall to this place, perhaps. It was the cleverness of this hired man of his.

The very suggestion of that word made Geraldi shake his head. There was nothing servile about this handsome blond fellow. Not that Western range riders ordinarily are a servile lot, but those who have known the pain of labor for money carry the impression subtly inscribed upon their faces, and the writing was not to be seen in the brow of this fellow.

"I dunno," he murmured now, his quick, keen, gray eyes constantly stabbing at Geraldi with a combination of watchfulness, suspicion, and savagery. "I suppose I could tell you that most people call me Mickey?"

"Mickey!" said Geraldi, and knew instantly that there was a lie in the very suggestion.

That Irish nickname has a cheerful sound to it. It is given to blue-eyed, red-headed Celts, to mischief-making, carefree lads, as a rule, and there was nothing careless or carefree about this son of battle. At least, every moment of his talk with Geraldi was like the clashing of swords.

"You've taken an instinctive liking to me," smiled Geraldi. "I can see that, Mickey! But tell me now—because I see you're a fellow with brains. What happened to this horse? Wasn't he dead beat an hour ago?"

"He was dead in his tracks," said the other, almost reluctantly turning his pale, fierce eyes from Geraldi to the horse. "I never seen a worse beat one!"

"And you didn't see anything that

could have brought him back to himself?"

"The sun," said the cow-puncher. "He stood down there and faced the sun."

He said it gravely, but Geraldi felt that in the words of Mickey there was the same suspicion and mockery and wonder which he himself felt on this subject. He almost wished that Ingall would hurry back from the trees so that he could ask him questions. Then he realized that it was a subject which nothing could have persuaded him to open again. He would have let ten mysteries of greater moment slide rather than see that wild look come back into the grim face of Ingall.

"Is that all, boss?" asked Mickey.

"That's all. Thanks."

Mickey touched his hat and went on. There was a useless mockery and contempt in this simulated salute, and Geraldi felt his blood boil as it had not boiled since he was a child. If Mickey for little or no reason hated him, it was apparent that he was beginning to hate Mickey.

He wondered at himself, but the thing was there in his blood like a poison and would not away. He wondered at it.

It troubled him, indeed, more than anything that had happened in a great time, for as a rule he had himself under the most perfect control. Whether in crime or in war, your great actor must be a man of a large and magnanimous temper, and that temper Geraldi usually possessed, but Mickey seemed to have snatched away his self-control. He had a wild impulse to shout after the man, and hurl insults; and even after Mickey had disappeared among the trees, still Geraldi felt ill at ease. He had to walk up and down to curb himself.

He was glad when Ingall returned from the trees.

These made a solid little group on the northeastern side of the hill, marching up to the tuft of rocks which was a natural fortress. The pines clustered together, and yet they seemed to have been planted in their close ranks by a human plan and forethought.

Ingall had decided, it appeared, that the day had gone so far that it would be better if they remained here until the morning came. There was a little spring among the rocks, a mere trickle of water and yet ample for cooking and for watering the horses, where it had collected in a pool. They could camp here in perfect comfort, and on the next day they could return to San Felice with ease, where Mary must be waiting for them anxiously.

"But," said Geraldi, "there are seven men out there somewhere among the hills. They may have a chance, during the night, to rush us. Or else, they may be able to get together help and mob us during the return march."

Ingall smiled upon him with a superior knowledge.

"Let me tell you," he said, "that no harm can come to me in this spot. And you, Wilbur, are my friend!"

He smiled as he spoke, and in a different manner. Then he enlarged his speech simply.

"Because, Wilbur, after a man has traveled for a while through this strange and foolish world, he begins to learn how other men are to be prized, and I never have met," said Ingall seriously and thoughtfully, "a fellow like you—with half of your hawklike or pantherlike nature, I mean to say, and with half of your nobility behind the veil!"

He brushed his own thought aside.

It was wearing toward the evening and calling Mickey with a sharp whistle, Ingall gave orders that camp would be pitched on that spot and preparations made for supper.

By the time that supper was cooked, it was already close to thick dusk, and

as they sat about and finished their cigarettes, and Ingall a long, thin, black cigar, the night settled over them.

It seemed to change their position subtly. The last light banded the horizon with softest rose, and above the rose was a clear, transparent strip of green, and above the green the twilight blue began, thinly streaked with starlight, here and there. They appeared to be pressed upward from their hill, or as if the hill itself grew higher toward the heart of heaven. So they sat, surrounded with the soft evening.

But Geraldi said, a little anxiously: "Suppose the seven slip up behind those trees, Mr. Ingall? They could do that, easily enough, and blow us into the middle of kingdom come, eh?"

Ingall answered gently, as if to a child: "No harm will ever come to me or to friends of mine in this place, Wilbur."

The cow-puncher, at that, raised his blond head—glistening by the firelight, and looked across at Geraldi with the strangest of smiles. Geraldi frowned in return, and then the train of his thoughts was quite broken across.

Ingall with a choked cry had started to his feet, and Geraldi, turning his head toward the trees, saw on the black verge of them the strangest figure that ever met his eyes. It was a naked man with a loin cloth wrapped about his middle, and on his head an odd dress from which branched something like horns. But the form of this man and his accouterment were the least of his strangeness.

The horns on his head; the wig which he wore; the loin cloth; all his naked body in addition, glowed and shimmered with a golden light.

Ingall staggered, and then throwing out his arms he went straight for that apparition. He began to run, reeling like a drunken man, while the golden form moved backward among the trees, glimmered, and was gone from view.

"Ingall!" shouted Geraldi. "Ingall! Come back!"

There was not an answer. Beside him, Geraldi heard the frightened, thick breathing of Edgar. He looked back across the fire, and there sat Mickey with a smile of devilish calm and content upon his face.

"Ingall!" cried Geraldi, and started to run in pursuit.

He thought that Mickey called something behind him, but he could not be sure.

Only he knew that that voice filled him to the very heart with suspicion and alarm. He ran warily, all eyes before and to either side, and a naked gun in his hand.

So he entered the thick shadow of the trees, swinging from side to side to avoid their extending branches—his toes caught on a soft form and he almost pitched to the ground.

Then he whirled and kneeled by the figure which he could dimly see stretched upon the ground.

"Ingall!" he called softly, for he had no doubt of the identity of that moveless form.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BOLT IS TURNED.

HE called again and received no reply. He lifted the head of the fallen man and leaned closer.

Then, in a dying voice, a pause between the words, Ingall answered: "The—hand—of—the god! Horus, golden Horus, on the two horizons you——"

A shudder stiffened him, his head dropped back, and Geraldi knew that he was dead.

This, then, was ended. So Geraldi brushed Ingall and his fate from his mind. He lifted his head and looked around him at the dull, shadowy forms of the trees, one blending vaguely with another.

Out of them came a long, yellow blade of light, wavered, and then fixed on Geraldi. But though seconds are required to tell of the coming of that light, it was only a flash of fumbling before the radiance fell upon him.

He leaped up and to one side, a gun in his hand as he sprang from the thrust of that bright sword.

Behind him, before him, almost like an explosion and an echo, two guns spoke; two bullets kissed the air beside his head; and he fired in turn at the source of that light just as it winked out.

A stifled groan told him that he had struck the mark. Then, spinning about, the suddenness of that movement baffled the aim of a second gun, which now flashed through the brush just behind him; and straight at that flash Geraldi sprang and sent a bullet flying before him.

The branches were cleared away before him; his shoulder struck a body which already was falling, and Geraldi himself tumbled headlong upon the ground.

His hand struck the metal coldness of a small, heavy box—the box of the golden Horus—the fatal box for which poor Ingall had been drawn to his death like an ox to the slaughter!

He gathered it into the crook of his left hand and crouched, expectantly waiting. There was no movement in the form which he had shot down, and he felt a tigerish satisfaction in the thought that he had killed one of these murderers.

The whole grove was crashing with gunfire, now. Twice he heard curses loud and long, as bullets flew apparently close to some of these hunters after his head.

And then he heard a loud voice ringing through the trees:

"Get him, or it's better to have lost the box! Get him, or we've worked for nothing!"

The voice of Mickey!

Was it not crystal clear? Poor Ingall's hired man was simply one of these scoundrels; he had hired murder, so to speak, and put it on a horse to ride with him like his shadow!

Another voice boomed from the opposite side of the trees, pitched deep, but carrying like thunder:

"A couple of you take the outside of the trees. Hunt hard! He's poison for us all, if he gets away!"

And that was his old, former enemy, his lately redeemed friend, fat, smiling, treacherous Cousin Edgar!

In a blinding stroke of red rage, Geraldi was on his feet to rush toward that voice, but better sense came to him. He turned back and made quickly for the edge of the woods.

As he ran, he untangled the problem. It came apart like half-twisted woolen yarn. Of course, Edgar had meant well enough until he saw the box rendered back to Ingall. But after that, he had sensed with the uncanny brain of a true criminal the identity of big Mickey. Quickly they had struck a compact between them—the golden god, or his lying semblance, had been enough to draw Ingall to his death. Now all their hands had no employment except to find Geraldi himself.

And a shudder of savage determination ran through him at the thought!

He reached the wood's edge. The steep slope opened before him through the rocks and down it he raced.

He stopped racing, and began to jog softly forward. It was thickest night. In this hollow he could not be seen against any sky line, and his hope was high indeed.

Then hoofbeats thudded softly, swiftly, toward him. He dropped to the ground, not flat on his face, but on hands and knees, his muscles gathered, and saw a rider sweep out of the darkness and into it again. He even saw the gleam of the gun in his hand and

knew, somehow, that the man was the false Mickey.

Then he stood up and began to run again, never sprinting, keeping well within his strength. He made for the nearest cleft between the hills, and through the cleft he passed, and kept on with a swinging stride.

A light blinked, after an hour, to the left of his course. He turned toward it and saw the faint outline of a house draw up out of the night. It was a typical ranch house, he saw at once. The trees had been cleared away for firewood—the easiest the nearest! And the "front yard" was simply a bare stretch which made convenient places for the establishment of hitching racks.

Geraldi knocked at the front door; knocked again; heard a long echo travel down the hall within; and then a window scraped up, overhead, and a woman's weary voice called down: "Is that you, Bert?"

"No," said Geraldi. "It's an unlucky fellow who's had a horse break a leg. I want another. Can you sell me something?"

She hung in the window, hesitating.

"I'll call Sam."

She called Sam. His steps trailed down the steps into the lower hall, while Geraldi turned his head and eagerly scanned the brows of the hills against the stars. If the hunt came this way, they surely would ride for the light, just as he had done.

Sam proved to be a fellow of fifty, with a red, bald head, and an undershirt and pair of overalls for clothes.

He jerked his head at Geraldi.

"Howd'ye. You wanna hoss, do you?"

"I want a horse."

"You got no saddle, neither."

"I have no saddle, either."

"You come along and we'll fix you up," said the other.

One would have thought that it was the commonest sort of business for him to fit out customers with horses in the middle of the night.

"You're in a hurry?"

"A great hurry," said Geraldi in the most heartfelt voice.

"You know a hoss, son?"

He led on around the side of the house, as he spoke.

"I know a horse, fairly well."

"You want something good?"

"The best, man! The best!"

"Ah, now I like to hear a gent talk up like that. You come right along. I'll show you the best, right enough!"

He took Geraldi to a corral. Then he turned up his lantern. It made a swinging light, a veritable signal torch which could have been seen from any point along the faces of those hills.

"Can't you drive those horses into the shed?" asked Geraldi anxiously. "Hold on!"

A silver gray, stockinged in black, so that it seemed to be running without lower legs at all, swung past him with the excited swirl of the other horses in the inclosure.

"Hello! That one ought to do!" said Geraldi.

Sam turned upon him with a jerk of the head.

"Where you raised?" he asked.

"Texas," said Geraldi.

"You were!" said Sam. "They can't read a book by lantern light in Texas, let alone a hoss! You want that gray?"

"Yes, and I want him quick."

"You can have him, son. But you gotta pay for him."

"Well, well, what's the price?"

"Eight hundred dollars will make that hoss yours."

"Eight hundred poor jokes," said Geraldi impatiently. "I asked you the price of that horse, not what you'd pay for a racer."

"My son," said Sam, "they's a lot of other hosses in this here corral. You said you wanted the best one. You picked the best one. And I gave you

a price on it. Now look 'em over again and try to pick one with a cheaper price!"

Geraldi surrendered.

"I'll take him then," he said. "But you're a confounded robber."

"Robber?" said Sam. "A gent paid six hundred dollars for that little old hoss a year ago, and if he ain't growed two hundred dollars better inside of a year, I eat my hat."

He had brought a rope with him. Now he stepped through the crowd of horses and with one jerk of his arm sent the noose flying. It settled on the neck of the gray, and he led him out of the corral.

"Now a saddle?"

"Now a saddle. Not an eight-hundred-dollar one."

"I got a good one I can give away for thirty dollars. You come and look at it."

So Geraldi followed to a shed which, apparently, had been built originally as a granary, for the floor and even the lower part of the walls had been polished by the pressure of countless rough-sided sacks.

Bridles, saddles, and all manner of riding equipment down to leather chaps were scattered here upon the floor. A powerful room it was, with walls made of double layers of wood. The very door was a massive, double slab. Rats would have a hard job breaking into this treasure-trove.

"I got the gray's bridle in the house," said Sam. "You stir around and look these things over. I'll come back in a minute."

He put down the lantern and left the room, grunting as he dropped down to the ground from the high step. Geraldi had picked up a saddle when he heard a soft little click. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that the door had been swung to, and at the same time he heard the loud grating of the key in the rusty lock as the bolt was turned.

CHAPTER XV.

NO ROOM.

GERALDI did not leap at the door. He simply called: "And you're one of Mickey's arms, I suppose?"

"I suppose I am," said Sam cheerfully from the farther side of the door. "Sorry I had to shut you up, young feller. But you'll be pretty comfortable in there till he comes and I can ask him does he want you."

"Look here——" began Geraldi.

The voice of Sam answered from a distance: "You'd better settle down—I'm gunna——"

What ended the sentence, Geraldi could not tell, for Sam apparently was walking on toward the house in perfect security that his door and his granary walls would hold a stronger force than Geraldi.

And the latter was inclined to agree.

He did not even waste time in sounding the walls or the floor. The very look of them was enough for him. But he took from beneath his coat the golden box which, it seemed, must now go back to Mickey, Edgar, and their company. The first glance at it by the lantern light showed that the green orb above the head of Osiris had been removed!

He turned it hastily. Every one of the emeralds had been torn from their settings, and then, apparently, the box had been cast aside as a worthless thing!

He raised the lantern and glanced through the keyhole of the big lock. The light shone straight through—the key had been removed by the care of old Sam, and Geraldi started with pleasure. It left him a free hand for the work which he knew better, perhaps, than any other.

In an instant he was on one knee and had unfolded upon the other a little roll of thin chamois which contained in flat pockets some narrow bits of steel of

varying sizes. He tried one of these in the lock; he changed it for another and larger size at once; and then he began to work carefully, his ear close to the door, laboring by sense of touch, and by the ear, and by a peculiar extra sense which came, perhaps, from the examination of a thousand locks of all makes in the world.

The work had not gone on for a minute before he heard distinctly the beating of the hoofs of horses, the creaking of saddle leather. These sounds swept up close; then voices began. Even the strong nerves of Geraldi gave way a little and perspiration stood on his face. But he worked on carefully, feeling his way in the double darkness of the iron hood which lay between him and the workings of that old lock, and the rust which held it.

Then there was the faintest of groans —something gave—the massive door sagged slightly open!

There was little religion in Geraldi, but now he flashed a single upward glance. Then he blew out the lantern, pushed the door just wide enough to allow his escape, and stepped out into the night, the box still under the flap of his coat and held in place by his left arm, as there was high probability that, otherwise, the glint of the metal might be observed even by starlight.

He shut the door behind him, observing that eight or nine horses were now grouped around the hitching racks in front of the little house. There were many voices; and now the door opened and there appeared the tall form of Mickey, accompanied by Sam and a lantern.

Geraldi stepped around the corner of the shed and heard the others come toward him. He heard Mickey turn and call to the rest. Edgar came, leading on the others, and exclaiming: "You never know. You have to make sure of a rat, once you get him cornered."

"Of course you do," said Mickey, "and I dunno—it may be a better job to just burn the place down and let him toast inside of it. If we try to break at one rack; a magnificent group of us!"

"But it ain't Geraldi, really!" protested Sam.

"It ain't nobody else," said Mickey. "And we had him. We had him in a net and he slipped through. I don't know how, still!"

"He's a snake," said Edgar with warmth. "You never have him, till you have him dead."

Geraldi, listening to those involuntary tributes, smiled to himself. He passed rapidly around the shed, slipped across to the front of the house, and worked in among the horses. They were tethered at one rack—a magnificent group of animals, and one standing out beyond the rest even in the dark of the night—a huge fellow with a noble arched neck, and a small, proud head. Geraldi quietly untied the reins and knotted them, pair to pair, in a long, loose chain. He took his post at the side of the big horse.

The whole force of Mickey was now grouped around the closed door of the granary.

"Geraldi!" called Mickey. "D'you hear me?"

Who was this Mickey, then; this illiterate cow-puncher, and yet able to command with absolute power such men as Edgar and Seyf Kalam, and the rest of those international criminals?

"He won't answer," said Edgar. "He's simply trying to make us curious. He'll never answer, until we've opened the door. And then he'll be out like a cat, a gun in each hand!"

Mickey laughed a little.

"To think of the great Geraldi bein' snagged like this!" said he. "To think of that! By heck, I gotta laugh!" And laugh he did, more loudly.

Geraldi swung up to the saddle. He made himself comfortable. In the long

holster beneath his right knee there now was a rifle—doubtless of the best make and fully loaded. His position could not be improved upon.

Mickey had knocked at the door again.

He called: "I'll tell you what, Geraldi. You come out here and give your oath not to make no trouble, and maybe we'll give you a fair trial and see if we can't reach an agreement. There's room in this world for you and me to be friends, maybe!"

"No room!" said Geraldi. "Not room enough for you and me on the earth or under it!"

They had whirled about with a universal groan of astonishment. Sam even dropped the lantern. But from the ground it shone on them all and made their tall, awkward shadows stand high above them on the granary wall. They did not bolt to get out of the light. Neither did they shoot in the direction of Geraldi's voice. Bewilderment seemed to have gripped them. As for Sam, he actually had thrown an arm across his face, as though to shut out the terrible miracle from his mind.

"I've marked you all down," said Geraldi. "Seyf Kalam, Lucien Rompier, Giovanni Strozzi, Pedro Oñate, my old friend Edgar, and you, Mickey. I'll learn more of you later, And I'll never leave your trail, my friends, until I've run you down. Do you hear? I want only one life to pay for the life of Robert Ingall. And I'll take a ransom from the other four—each one an emerald to fit into the golden box, which goes into the safekeeping of the dead man's daughter, my friends, until every jewel is back in place!"

He turned the head of the big horse, jerked on the lead reins, and so he moved off with the troop into darkness, and still that stunned group remained motionless before the granary door.

Further adventures of Geraldi will appear in later issues of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

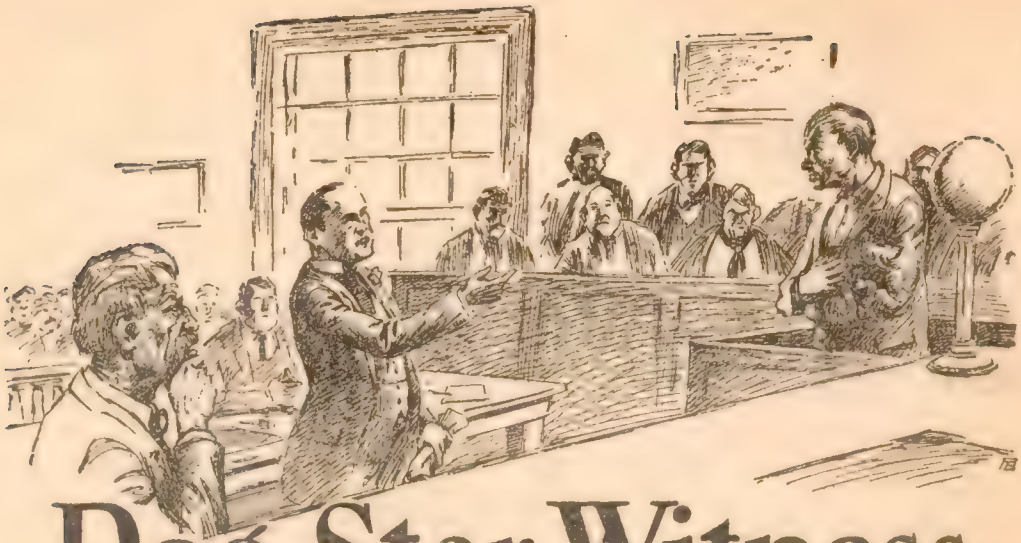
THE AMERICAN INDIAN ABROAD

TEMPERAMENT is not confined to prima donnas; the American Indian has a large share of it, too, according to Clarence Schultz, a former member of the famous "101 Ranch" show, who recently returned from Germany. Schultz ought to know, for he had with him eighteen Indians whom he exhibited—not without attendant troubles—in a German circus.

One of the prime causes of difficulty was jealousy. When, for instance, the antics of one member drew applause from the crowd, the rest of the troupe would break forth into riots. In Berlin, it became actually necessary to have a police guard posted over it. The fact that Schultz's performers belonged to three different tribes did not help in the adjustment of difficulties. There was a delegation of Sioux from North Dakota; then there were Pueblos from New Mexico, while a few Iroquois from New York State completed the group.

Intertribal warfare broke out on numerous occasions, necessitating no less than six councils of peace. At one of these, Schultz had himself elected overlord of all the Indians, with the title of Big Chief Travel-the-World. After that diplomatic coup discipline was a bit more easily maintained.

To complicate matters still further, some of the Indians, while temporarily off the warpath, fell in love with German women. Emotion, it seems—far from having a mellowing effect—caused the Indians to become more temperamental than ever.



Dog, Star Witness

By

Ray Humphreys

Author of "Shorty's Glorious Fourth," etc.

SAY, boss," began Deputy Sheriff "Shorty" McKay, cautiously, "have yuh got three dollars which ain't workin'?"

"Huh?" asked Sheriff Joe Cook, who was pacing the office with his hands clasped behind his back and a worried look on his face. "Have I got what?"

Shorty puffed nervously on his cigarette.

"I say—have yuh got three cartwheels as ain't rollin'? Three bucks—three iron men?"

The sheriff scowled at the interruption to his thoughts.

"Yes—what of it?"

"I wanta borry 'em until pay day!" said Shorty.

"What fer?"

"I'm broke!"

"As usual," commented the sheriff, dryly, "but what yuh want three dollars fer, Shorty?"

Shorty hesitated. He knew his boss was worried half sick over a case he had in district court that morning, but, faint heart never won fair lady, Shorty figured, nor three dollars either, so he screwed up his courage and tried a friendly smile on the frowning sheriff.

"I wanta experiment!" he explained, almost in a whisper.

The sheriff's brow grew darker.

"Experiment?" he growled. "Yuh mean go down an' experiment with the rollin' dominos in the Elite livery stable."

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Er—do yuh mean experiment how long yuh kin keep from payin' me back ef I loan 'em to yuh?"

"Aw, boss, yuh know——"

The sheriff squinted suspiciously at Shorty, and Shorty seemed to wilt under the glare. There was no use in trying to conceal too much from Sheriff Joe Cook, after all. Shorty fidgeted in his chair.

"Experiment how?" demanded the sheriff.

"Waal," said Shorty, desperately, "the truth is, boss, I wants to buy me a good dawg, which——"

"Dawg?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yuh want to borry three dollars offen me to buy a dawg, eh?" said the sheriff, sourly. "An' what kinda experiment is that goin' to be, I'd like to know? A test as to which is the biggest loonytic—me fer loanin' the three dollars er yuh fer payin' three dollars fer a dawg, er——"

"Lissen, sheriff!"

"What kinda dawg is it?" asked the sheriff. "Trick dawg, huntin' dawg, bloodhoun' dawg yuh figger on usin' fer office work?"

"It's—it's a mamma dawg!" admitted Shorty, feebly.

"Says which?"

"A mamma dog," said Shorty, miserably, realizing that he was gettin' in deeper every moment. "A mother dawg, I might say. It's yaller with sorta brown an' red spots all over it, an' a white haid, an' the fluffiest tail yuh ever seen, an' it's name is Winifred, bein' named after a girl who——"

"Stop!" whooped the sheriff, banging the desk with a clenched fist. "Stop, I say, not another word! I don't give a whoop in my sleep who the dawg is named after—man, woman or child! An' yuh ain't borryin' no three dollars offen me to buy that Wilamena houn', not in a thousand Tuesdays! Winona ain't comin' here to turn this office inter a kennel! An' what's more, yuh ain't goin' out to buy no dawg while we got this 'Tuffy' Meadows' case on in court, either! He's goin' to be hard to convict, the sneak thief, an' it ain't no time fer yuh to be buyin' no Wanda dawg."

"Winifred!" corrected Shorty, patiently.

"Yuh heard me!" roared the sheriff.

Shorty heard him, so did two citizens who were passing by on the other side of the courthouse square. Shorty said nothing. He just sat still and thought things over. Yes, it was a poor time to suggest a loan, when the sheriff was trying to send the slickest thief in the history of Monte Vista to the penitentiary and wasn't getting very far in that laudable effort before a jury in district court. Tuffy Meadows was a smooth crook—too smooth, possibly, for the sheriff to prove anything on. All morning Shorty had sat in court and listened to Tuffy outwit Sheriff Cook, and at the noon recess Shorty had suggested the loan of three dollars to purchase the Winifred "mamma" dog as an experiment, but——

Well, Shorty knew better than to try to argue with the sheriff when the sheriff was in a mood where he would argue with a chair rather than with words. Shorty had dodged flying chairs and books before and there was no winning such an argument! So Shorty sat silent as a mummy while Sheriff Cook paced back and forth, back and forth, muttering awful threats against Ben Lowry, Tuffy's shrewd attorney, and berating the jury for believing a word that the defense attorney said.

"Why," exploded Sheriff Cook, finally, "one look at that Tuffy would convince any ordinary, sensible man that he was a crook! What ef I kain't prove jus' whar he took this or that, ain't his phiz enough to send him to the penitentiary, I asks?"

"Yes!" agreed Shorty.

"An' ef I could jus' break through his alibi defense in one place, ef I could show whar he stole just one thing, I'd have him!" went on the sheriff, hotly. "But I kain't! He's so blamed smooth he's got a answer fer every incriminatin' question the county attorney asks him! He's admittin' nuthin'."

"No," agreed Shorty.

"I'm goin' out fer two or three cups

o' coffee!" said the sheriff, "an' fer a walk, to steady my nerves. Court starts ag'in at two bells, but I'll be back afore that so yuh kin go to lunch, Shorty. Yuh stay here until I comes back!"

The sheriff banged out, mumbling. Shorty sat perfectly still for all of five minutes. He sympathized with the sheriff. He knew that his boss was one of that rough-and-ready sort of officer, so common in Colorado, who would and could and did go through every difficulty to get a criminal, but who had no patience with a law court that gave the crook more than an even break to side-step justice. A smart crook, with a smart lawyer, had outwitted the honest old sheriff before, and it looked to Shorty as though Tuffy Meadows were going to repeat the trick. It looked the same to Sheriff Cook, so no wonder he was upset.

"Now, ef I could reason with that man!" grumbled Shorty, but he went no further. He looked up at the clock. Twelve twenty. He delved into a trouser pocket and brought out a handful of small change. Eighteen pennies. Five nickels. Eleven dimes. One Canadian quarter, worth fifteen cents at either Monte Vista bank, but passable at face value in the Sunday collection basket at church. One beer check, worth two-and-a-half cents at the old Rainbow Saloon, which had been closed for nine years. A dollar fifty-three cents in real money! Shorty got up, went to the sheriff's desk, and opened a drawer marked "Petty Cash." There were eight dimes, four nickels, and seven pennies there. A total of one dollar and seven cents, or, with Shorty's personal capital, a grand total of two dollars and sixty cents. Shorty scratched his head. He tried the little safe. It was locked. Then his face lit up with a brilliant smile.

"Why didn't I think o' that before!" he exclaimed.

He went back to the desk and opened a drawer marked "Stamps, Rubber, and Postage." He took out a sheaf of two-cent stamps and tore off twenty with more haste than neatness. Twenty two-centers amounted to forty cents. And forty cents added to two dollars and sixty cents equaled three dollars, and three dollars was just what Shorty needed! He sat down at the desk a moment, scrawled something on a piece of paper, and then jumped up and departed in breathless excitement just as the clock chimed twelve thirty. Time was passing quickly and he had no time to lose!

At two minutes to two Sheriff Cook returned, still scowling. His coffee and his brisk walk hadn't helped his nerves to any noticeable extent. He started as he found the office empty, but his eyes lit on the note Shorty had left on the desk. He grabbed it up. He read it with mounting anger. He read, in Shorty's familiar scrawl:

> Boss, as a student of the system of the great Ambrose Swattledown, I'm off on an experiment. Have borrowed "petty cash" and stamps. Will bring Winifred back with me. Be patient. SHORTY.

The sheriff read the note twice to be sure, and then——

"Sufferin' jack rabbits," exploded the sheriff, with a roar that made several cow ponies at the hitching rack jerk their heads up nervously, "ef this ain't too much fer a sane man to stand! Gone—gone, after I expressly ordered him to stay! Gone to experiment with a pooch, accordin' to—accordin' to this feller—this——" The sheriff referred to the note again. "Accordin' to the system of Ambrose Swattledown!" went on the sheriff, with reddening face. "Ambrose Swattledown! Now, who in forty blazin' acres is Ambrose Swattledown? An' who the heck cares! Ambrose Swattledown—an' me with Tuffy Meadows on my hands, an' losin'

the case, an' Shorty out experimentin' with Ambrose Swattledown!"

A grim smile settled on the sheriff's face.

"When Shorty an' Ambrose come back, so help me Hannah, I'll clap both o' 'em in jail so fast they won't know what struck 'em!"

Two minutes later the sheriff was in court, boiling with rage.

Jerry O'Connell, the young prosecuting attorney, came over, a tragic look on his face. He leaned close to the sheriff.

"Sheriff," said Jerry, sadly, "we have got just one chance left of convictin' this slick hombre, an' that's if his lawyer, Lowry, will let his client get on the stand. We haven't proved a thing against Meadows yet, but if we get him under cross-examination once we can tangle him up."

Sheriff Cook's feverish eyes glowed.

"Now yuh're talkin', Jerry," said the sheriff. "That's the fust sensible thing yuh said all day! Ef yuh'd spent more time this mawnin' tellin' the jury what a low-down crook this Meadows was instead o' readin' out o' a lot o' musty old law books to 'em, we'd have got along further."

The prosecutor flushed.

"You don't understand legal procedure, sheriff," protested Jerry, unhappily, "but—well, maybe we can get Meadows tangled if we get him on the witness stand and put a few embarrassing questions to him; that is, if we can work a trick on his attorney to get him on the stand. You know, the defendant doesn't have to testify if he doesn't want to!".

The sheriff nodded.

"Trot out yuhr tricks an' see that he does, then!" he said.

So, when court opened, and the bailiff had pounded for order, and Judge Sam Jackson had taken the bench, and the jury had filed in, and the prisoner was in his place, Jerry O'Connell, prosecuting attorney, arose and made a brief announcement.

"If the court please," he said, "the State has finished its case and rests. I presume the defense will offer no witnesses and no testimony, seeing they don't dare to put the defendant on the stand——"

"I object!" whooped Lowry, the defense counsel, springing to his feet. "That was said solely to prejudice the jury against my client, if the court please! I saw we *do* dare to put Mr. Meadows on the stand. I say we do more than dare, we put him on the stand! Mr. Meadows, take the witness stand, if you please!"

Mr. Meadows stood up. He was a small, ratty-looking fellow, but the look on his face at that moment was positively angelic. He smiled wanly at the jury, as if to say "Isn't it a shame any one would accuse me of being a thief?" He crossed daintily to the witness chair, carrying in his arms a small pup. No one had noticed that pup before, but the first thing Tuffy Meadows' lawyer did, after Tuffy had been sworn by the clerk of the court, was to draw every one's attention to the defendant's pup.

"Mr. Meadows!" said the lawyer, in an offhand way, "is a great lover of animals. He is a kindly sort of fellow, honest as the day is long, a lover of pets. I hope the court doesn't object if the witness holds the pup—he won't trust the animal out of his arms. He loves it, gentlemen of the jury, he——"

"Go ahead!" said the court wearily.

Then, under his attorney's questioning, Tuffy Meadows related that he was a stranger in Monte Vista; that he was a tourist from Kansas; that he was the son of a minister; that he had never been in trouble before; that he was no thief, as the sheriff charged; that he was a respectable citizen, and had simply been lingering in Monte Vista

to enjoy the superb scenery when he was arrested; that he loved pets; loved the old fireside in his father's manse, and had never been arrested before in his life. He swore that he had never stolen anything anywhere.

The lawyer turned to the prosecutor in triumph.

"You may cross-examine, if you wish!" he offered.

Jerry O'Connell got to his feet. The sheriff sat up eagerly. Here was the one and only chance of convicting Tuffy Meadows—if they could succeed in tangling him up on cross-examination!

Jerry pointed to the collection of things resting on the table—things that Sheriff Cook had found in Tuffy's possession when he had arrested him—things that were supposed to have been stolen.

"Mr. Meadows," purred O'Connell, "where did you get that gold watch, if I may ask you?"

"It was a gift from—my father—in Kansas!" said Tuffy.

"Then you didn't steal it from one William Fleck of two miles east of Monte Vista last Thursday?"

"Of course not," cried Meadows, "an' you can't say I did! Fleck himself said he couldn't identify that watch as his!"

All of which was very true. Fleck, a plodding old farmer, had no record of the number of his stolen watch. He had testified that morning that the watch found on Tuffy looked like the one a sneak thief had taken from him, but he wasn't positive. A man couldn't be convicted on that kind of testimony.

"And this three hundred dollars the sheriff found on you," persisted the prosecutor, "where did you get all that money, Mr. Meadows?"

"Earned it—down in Denver!" sputtered Tuffy.

"Then this isn't the three hundred dollars that Joe Bailey missed out of his tobacco jar on the seventeenth of this month?"

"Sure not!" cried Tuffy, with injured pride, "and he said he couldn't identify it, didn't he?"

That was right. Mr. Bailey had lost a wad of three hundred dollars, but he could remember only that it was in fives and tens, and naturally he hadn't been able to swear that morning that this money was his.

Sheriff Cook groaned and gritted his teeth.

"This revolver?" asked O'Connell, picking up a gun from the evidence table, "where did you get this, Mr. Meadows?"

"In Kansas City—three years ago."

"You didn't take it out of Earl Black's butcher shop then?"

"No, and Black didn't say I did, either!"

Yes, that was correct. Black was a dull fellow. He had refused to swear positively that this was his gun. He said he thought it was, but that was too flimsy in law. So Tuffy won again.

"Well," said O'Connell, "how about these five loose diamonds?"

"I traded an overcoat fer them in Topeka," said Tuffy.

"In Topeka?" asked O'Connell. "Sure you didn't filch them out of Mrs. Gus Apple's home here, and pry them out of their settings?"

"No!"

Mrs. Apple had been unable to say absolutely that these five stones were her missing jewels. They looked like them, but—no, she couldn't swear a man into jail on that!

"And this banjo?" asked O'Connell.

"Bought it in St. Joe," said Tuffy.

"Didn't take it out of the high school here?"

"No!"

"And this leather suit case full of women's clothes?"

"It's my aunt's—I was takin' it East fer her."

"Didn't steal it from our depot?"

"No!"

"And this heavy bolt of silk?"

"Found it in St. Louis last month!"

"Didn't steal it?"

"No!"

And so it went. The desperate prosecutor picked up every single thing on the table and held it up and asked Tuffy where he got it, and Tuffy came right back with a good answer to each question. Tuffy was sailing to victory —and an acquittal. His attorney was all smiles, just as Sheriff Joe Cook was all dark frowns. The sheriff was morally certain that the majority or all of the articles on the table were stolen, but due to the fact that folks were unable to positively identify their own goods, it appeared that Tuffy Meadows was going free.

The prosecutor shot a helpless glance at the sheriff.

"Sheriff," he asked, finally, after he had failed to tangle the witness on one single question, "is there anything I have overlooked—any question?"

The sheriff glared.

"Yes," he said, "ask that wall-eyed crook what relation he is to Ananias—a cousin, or nephew, or——"

"Object!" roared defense counsel.

"Objection sustained," droned the Court. "The jury will disregard Sheriff Cook's impertinent remark!"

The prosecutor was hopelessly lost. He floundered around with a few artless questions, battling for time. The sheriff, with a grunt of disgust, arose and stalked for the door. It was plain enough that Tuffy Meadows was going to be acquitted.

At the door the sheriff met Shorty, out of breath.

"Case over?" sputtered Shorty.

The sheriff passed on out of the courtroom, shoving Shorty out backwards. He closed the door before he answered the question.

"Yes, yuh blamed idjut, it's over as far as the law is concerned," blurted Sheriff Cook. "That dang crook goes free—free as the air. But that don't help yuh none, brother; I gave yuh orders which yuh disregarded."

Shorty made a pathetic gesture with his hands.

"But boss, I was experimentin'—as I said in the note—an' like the great Ambrose Swattledown points out——"

The sheriff remembered something.

"Oh, yes, Ambrose Swattledown!" said Cook. "Is he—is he here with yuh, Shorty?"

"No," said Shorty, hastily, "he ain't, boss."

"I was figgerin'," began the sheriff, recollecting that he had intended teaching both Shorty and Swattledown a lesson by jailing them at the first opportunity, "I was plannin'——"

Shorty interrupted.

"Is that Tuffy on the witness stand?" he asked.

"Yep!"

"Has he—he still got that purp with him?"

The sheriff eyed Shorty suspiciously.

"Yuh're dog crazy, eh?" snorted the sheriff. "Yes, he still has—but what difference does that make, I asks?"

"Everything!" cried Shorty. "Everything!"

Then, without waiting to explain to the astonished sheriff, Shorty brushed past, opened the courtroom door and dashed in, just in time to hear the prosecutor say in a tired voice, "Well, I guess that is all, Mr. Meadows."

"Wait!" whooped Shorty. "That ain't all!"

Heads turned. Spectators stood up to see who had come in. The judge frowned. The bailiff rapped smartly for order.

"Just a minute, Mr. Meadows!" said O'Connell.

Shorty rushed to the prosecutor's side and whispered to him. O'Connell's eyes opened wide as saucers. He

shook his head. Shorty clutched him by the arm, whispering more excitedly. O'Connell hesitated, scratched his head, frowned, and then took a whiff of Shorty's breath. No, Shorty wasn't drunk! The sheriff came in and took a seat up front, watching the proceedings with mingled surprise and suspicion. O'Connell was hesitating. Shorty was insisting. Oh, well, the case was lost anyway, decided the prosecutor, and a fool question could do no great harm.

"Ah—er—one more question, Mr. Meadows, please," said O'Connell, blushing. "I ask this one at—at the earnest behest of Mr. Shorty McKay, our deputy sheriff—and—well—where did you get that puppy dog, Mr. Meadows?"

The worried look on the faces of Tuffy and his perplexed attorney disappeared. They relaxed comfortably. This wasn't a catch, after all. Tuffy smiled triumphantly.

"I bought him—in Omaha!" answered Tuffy, loudly.

Again Shorty whispered excitedly to the prosecutor, and again O'Connell balked, shaking his head vigorously. But Shorty persisted. Finally, the prosecuting attorney shrugged his shoulders and turned to the judge on the bench.

"If your honor, please," said O'Connell, blushing again, "I would like to send the bailiff out into the street to gather up two or three—er—puppy dogs."

"What?" asked the court.

"Two or three—puppy dogs," said O'Connell, shamefaced.

"What?"

"Yes, if the court please!"

"What have two or three puppy dogs got to do with the guilt or innocence of my respected client, Mr. Meadows?" began the defense counsel, feeling that something was surely wrong. "I object—I object strenuously!"

"Now, what is the object of bringing in pups, Mr. O'Connell?" asked the judge. "I can't see where they——"

The prosecutor was red as a beet.

"I—all this is at the earnest behest of Mr. McKay," stammered O'Connell, "it is his—er—idea—and—and it may be important, if the court please, seeing Mr. McKay has a new and important witness, that—that——"

The judge hesitated.

"Very well," he said, after a pause and a glance at the uneasy prisoner. "Mr. Bailiff, fetch some—er—pups!"

The spectators giggled. Sheriff Cook sighed hopefully.

A new witness, eh?" he muttered. "It must be that bird, Ambrose Swattledown, that Shorty was talkin' about. Yes, Shorty must have him waitin' outside. Ef he ain't as crazy as Shorty mebbe thar'll be fireworks here yit!"

Shorty was whispering again to the flushed prosecutor. It was plain that O'Connell was doing all this against his better judgment. But it was also plain to be seen that Shorty was not in any mood to be refused his way. The pair whispered until the perspiring bailiff returned with two young pups.

"I—I ketched two!" he announced, embarrassed.

"Hold them!" snapped the prosecutor, at Shorty's orders. "And now Mr. McKay will produce the new witness——"

The defense counsel protested immediately, arguing that it was against legal procedure to bring in a late witness. The Court ordered the witness brought in, with the remark that the court was more interested in justice than in any dry laws.

Shorty dodged out quickly.

"It's Ambrose Swattledown, o' course!" decided the sheriff.

"Here we are," said Shorty, returning; but instead of bringing in a man, as the sheriff had figured, Shorty led in an old, shaggy, dirty dog.

"Put those pups on the floor!" ordered O'Connell to the bailiff, and the bailiff released his two pups.

"This is Winifred, a mamma dawg," said Shorty.

"Good gosh!" groaned the sheriff.

"I object!" roared defense counsel.

"Proceed!" snapped the Court, to Shorty.

"Now, Winifred," said Shorty, loudly, "look at them pups over thar—look at 'em—Winifred!"

The old dog did look that way for a moment. But she showed no interest in the frolicking puppies. She sniffed and turned away, lifting one hind foot to scratch at a persistent fly.

"Good night," sighed the sheriff, "he's nuts!"

But Shorty was grinning broadly.

"Mr. Meadows—put your pup down!" ordered Shorty.

Meadows hesitated. He couldn't see just what was coming—but he put the pup down on the floor. It shook itself, then whined plaintively. The old dog that Shorty had introduced as Winifred turned quick as a flash, emitted a joyful yelp, and sprang for the pup. The pup squealed in delight. The old hound reached it, licked its little face, fondled it, caressed it with wild abandon. The court and the courtroom watched entranced.

"That pup o' Meadows," said Shorty, "wasn't bought by him in Omaha, as he just said. That pup is the offspring o' that Winifred dawg, an' that Winifred dawg belongs to Fred Cosgriff, a rancher five miles east o' town, who had a pup stolen from him five days ago. It was a black pup, like this one—but all black pups look kinda alike—exceptin' to their own mothers! Gents o' the jury, yuh noticed this mamma dawg paid no attention to those other pups I had brought in—but she's positively identifyin' that pup Meadows had right now. Yuh gents are mostly farmers, an' know how animals act—I say that Winifred dawg has proved Meadows a liar about the pup bein' bought in Omaha. Ef he lied about that, he lied about other things—he's a danged thief!"

The court was in an uproar. The bailiff added to it by pounding for order, but there wasn't any order. The jabbering jury went into sudden conference, while Meadows' attorney cried out that such a proceeding was unfair. In a minute, one of the jurymen raised his hand.

"We, the jury, has seen enough," said the man, crisply. "We finds the defendant guilty of theft, as charged. He sure stole one pup, an' like as not he stole all the other stuff!"

"Whoopee!" roared the sheriff, throwing his hat in the air.

The courtroom was in a greater turmoil than ever now. The judge was complimenting Shorty. The sheriff pushed through the crowd, beaming. He got Shorty to one side in a hurry.

"Shorty!" he cried, happily, "fine work, son! Hurray for yuh an' Ambrose Wattledown——"

"Ambrose *Swattledown,*" corrected Shorty, patiently. "He's the feller wrote that new book on detective work they just got to the public library. I was experimentin' with his system o' makin' everything count—even the smallest things."

"But how did yuh ever figger about the pup, Shorty?"

Shorty chuckled.

"I saw Meadows holdin' it in his arms this mawnin'," said Shorty, "an' I overheard him an' his smart lawyer talkin' over what a good impression holdin' that pup would make on the farmer jury—a man lovin' animals wouldn't be a crook, an' all that—so I figgered he'd have the pup in court with him this afternoon. Meanwhile, I recollected that Fred Cosgriff, east o' here, had reported a black pup stolen several days ago. I put two an' two

together an' called up Cosgriff, but he couldn't describe the dawg he lost other than that it was a small black pup. Now, Ambrose Swattledown says not to overlook nuthin', no matter how small, so I asked Cosgriff ef he had the pup's mother an' he said yes, and that her name was 'Winifred,' an' I asked him to loan her to me an' he said no, but that he would sell her for three dollars—so that's why——"

The sheriff grabbed Shorty's hand.

"Put her thar, boy!" he whooped. "The county will refund me an' yuh that three dollars, an' Winnebago—er whatever her name is—kin sleep next to the stove in my office fer the rest of her days, her an' her pup—fer she's sent the slickest crook I ever seen to prison."

"Yep," corrected Shorty, "she an' me has."

"Yep!" agreed Sheriff Cook. "Yuh an' Winnipec—er Winesap—er Wyndotte, er whatever her name is——"

"Winifred!" said Shorty, patiently.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA
The Nighthawk

IN nearly all the States the nighthawk is found. Its scientific name is *Chordeiles virginianus*. Winter finds this bird in South America, but in summer it is numerous throughout the Western plains as well as in the East and northern Canada.

While the nighthawk belongs to the nightjar family, which is the whippoorwill, the habits of the two birds are quite different. The nighthawk not only flies at night, but may be seen making long, circling flights during late afternoon and early evening, these evolutions being a sight worth seeing, as they are particularly graceful. The nighthawk's expertness on the wing makes traveling unsafe for flying insects, since the bird is very quick to snatch at its prey. A sudden downward plunge while engaging in these circular flights is accompanied by a peculiar, hissing sound which is caused by the passage of air through the wings. Because of this noise, Southerners call it the "bull bat."

A peculiarity of this brown-speckled bird is its manner of resting on a limb. It does not perch crosswise like most birds, but squats lengthwise on the bough or rail of a fence.

It is not generally known that this bird is most valuable to mankind. It consumes enormous amounts of insects, especially ants, both in the cities and the country. Although the bird is small in size, except for the wings which are long and loose, its stomach is large enough to hold over fifteen hundred flying ants. When opened, the tiny stub of a bill discloses an enormous mouth.

The nighthawk owes little to nature since it does not even beg materials for a nest. The female simply lays two eggs upon the bare ground or a flat rock. In cities she will often lay them on gravel-topped roofs, where people are little apt to intrude.

Besides ants, grasshoppers, June bugs, potato bugs—and in the South, the much-feared cotton-boll weevil—constitute the diet of the nighthawk, so that its use to mankind is really important. It never touches grains or fruits, nor does it disturb the nests of other birds.

In some parts of the country the nighthawk is used for food, although its body is not fat. It is also, since it is commonly believed to be a useless bird, shot for target practice, which is a pity since it more than pays its debt to farmers and gardeners by its great consumption of grain-destroying insects.

The Brass Man

by George Owen Baxter

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

WELDON, a visitor to San Trinidad, is offered a job by Cunningham, border smuggler. Weldon asks if Francesca Laguarda, an attractive girl, is involved, and is warned against her. Doctor Watts, a feeble ancient, asks Weldon to protect his orphan patient, Helen O'Mallock. Weldon accepts his offer.

Helen, attended only by servants, is dying of consumption. Her father's hidden wealth has not been found. Twice the house has been entered and one attempt made to poison Helen. Watts thinks that the object is to frighten Helen away and search the house at leisure.

Weldon believes Watts' methods antiquated. He consults his friend, rascal but clever doctor, Benjamin Wilbur. They find that the general's body has been removed from its sarcophagus. Weldon surprises Francesca in the wood. He threatens to confront her with Helen. This frightens the intrepid creature. Weldon leaves Francesca, hands bound, with the cook. While downstairs, he hears a cry and the slamming of a door above.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AUNT MAGGIE OUT.

NO greyhound on a course ever ran more swiftly than Weldon. The ammonia bottle crashed on the floor. Gun in hand, he bounded up the stairs and reached the library door to find it shut. He tried it—the key was turned. But he had his own way with doors in a time of emergency. He drew back and hurled his weight against it, using the bunched muscles of his right shoulder as a sort of pad against the shock. The door groaned under the impact and gave a little. He flung himself forward again, like a charging bull, and lurched through the wreckage of the door into the chamber, half stunned, but with his gun ready and swinging to find a victim.

There was no victim in sight. Only Aunt Maggie half knelt, half lay in the corner against the window, and the same glance showed Weldon a little tangle of twine on the hearth.

Mysteriously, Francesca had managed to free herself of the twine, had attacked the old negress, then slammed and locked this door, and then——

The window, perhaps!

If she was tigress enough to manage

the other two feats, she was tigress enough to manage this one!

He gained that window with a bound and leaned far out. The moon rode high and clear. All that face of the building was naked, except for the climbing vine, whose leaves shivered and winked like pale silver in the moonlight. He scanned the ground beneath the wall.

It seemed impossible that she could have managed to climb down the face of the wall so rapidly. Certainly, in the time since that door was slammed and locked, she could not possibly have got down the hall to escape in another manner.

His own room, perhaps?

He went for it on the run—but though it was a woman for whom he searched, he had his teeth set, and his gun ready. Beautiful she might be, and his heart full of her, but she was as dangerous as fire!

He gained his room. Both closets he jerked open in turn, aand then he even glanced under the bed.

She was not there!

He stood still in the middle of the room and, drawing a long breath, he tried to make his brain clear, and yet it would not.

How could she, in the first place, have freed her wrists? He knew something about securing hands in case of need, and he never had made a more careful job than he had with the small, soft hands of Francesca. Granted that her hands were free, with what did she attack the negress?

He strode back into the library and found Aunt Maggie standing swaying, her hands pressed to her head.

"She freed herself from the twine and got at you, Aunt Maggie?" he asked quickly.

"She done that!" groaned the cook.

"How did you manage to get her away?"

"You cain't catch a lightning flash with your bare hands!" declared Aunt Maggie.

"Of course you can't. And then?"

Aunt Maggie pointed to a stick of firewood which lay in the middle of the hearth.

"That!" nodded Weldon. "She went past you like a flash, got her hand on that, then dropped you with it. And which way did she run?"

"The lights was turned off," said Aunt Maggie. "I couldn't see nothin'."

"Badly stunned, eh?"

"If you got that ammonia, Mr. Weldon, I sure could use a sniff of it!"

"Sit down here," he directed. "The little fiend! I hardly see how she—— But forget about her, Aunt Maggie!"

"I will," said the negress, "as soon as the bell stops death-tollin' in my head. My head ain't iron, Mr. Weldon!"

He, stepping back from her, picked up the fallen twine and passed it restlessly through his fingers, he saw that the ends were not frayed or rubbed through, but concisely cut.

How could she have managed that, lying helplessly on her back on the sofa?

"Aunt Maggie," he said, "can you talk now?"

"I don't want to talk," said she. "I want to go to bed and try to sleep off this here headache, Mr. Weldon! She raised a lump like an egg here."

"Let me see," said Weldon.

"Ain't you never seen a bump on the head before?" asked Aunt Maggie, scowling.

"It might be a fracture. You'd better let me see the place."

"I ain't gunna," said she stubbornly.

To Weldon it was almost more bewildering than all else which he had seen and heard on this strange evening. That Aunt Maggie, or any other negro, male or female, should fail to make the most of such an injury, received in such a way, fairly clouded his brain.

However, he did not push that inquiry further, merely saying: "How did it happen, Aunt Maggie? What did she do? Did you let her sit up on the couch?"

"What would I be letting her do that for?" asked Aunt Maggie, with a darker scowl than ever.

"I'm only asking questions," said Weldon.

"Then answer 'em yourself," said Aunt Maggie. "I'm pretty tired and I'm pretty sick in the head. It was you that brought that young woman right here into this room. What kind of questions could *you* answer about her, I'd like pretty much to know?"

She marched for the door, and Weldon let her go until, reaching it, she cast a sidewise glance at him.

"Aunt Maggie!" he called suddenly.

She turned on him with a jump.

"What right you got yellin' at a woman like that?" asked Aunt Maggie.

"Come back here by the fire!" said Weldon.

"I ain't gunna," said Aunt Maggie. "I'm tired. I'm gunna go to bed and try to——"

"Dream about what she paid for setting her free?"

"Paid?" gasped Aunt Maggie.

But her dark face turned a peculiar ashen color, strange to see.

He raised a threatening forefinger and shook it at her.

"Very well, Aunt Maggie, if you won't talk, I'll tell you what happened!"

She started again. It seemed to Weldon that if ever guilt appeared in a human face it appeared in hers now.

"The moment I left the room," said Weldon slowly, "she turned on the couch and looked up at you, and let you see the most beautiful face that ever told lies, eh? Was that what happened first?"

"I ain't talkin' and I ain't listenin'," said Aunt Maggie. "What do I care about pretty faces?"

She turned away, but only partly. A peculiar fascination kept her half facing him, and her eyes glittered like the eyes of a wild animal as she watched and waited.

"Then she offered you something of a good deal of importance, Aunt Maggie. Money from her purse, or maybe the purse itself, or even a ring from her finger!"

"She didn't have no rings on her fingers," said Aunt Maggie fiercely.

"Money then—and a promise of a heap more of it if you would cut the string that tied her hands together. And you did it!"

"I did not!" cried Aunt Maggie.

"Then you pretended to be stunned," said he in quiet continuation. "And the proof that you've been lying is that there is no lump at all on your head!"

She winced. Then: "White man," she said, "I ain't heard no more fool talk than this since I was a mite of a baby!"

She started for the door with a rush, but Weldon sprang before her.

"You've done that part of it!" said he. "But now tell me what that woman—or spirit—or whatever she is—did afterward. Which way did she go? Into my room? Through this window? Or—did she fade into the wall?"

He swept it, as he spoke, with a suspicious eye, remembering its four feet and more of thickness. After all, the general was exactly the sort of odd old chap who might well have arranged some such secret device in the walls of his house.

Aunt Maggie had turned sullen. She struck at the hand which held her fat arm, but when that blow failed to dislodge his hold, she made no further effort, simply refusing to speak, and staring at him sullenly.

"Maggie," he said to her, with all the solemnity which he could muster, "I want you to know that that young girl

who was here—pretty as she was, graceful, and all that—is the very person who may be the death of your mistress. Do you hear me?"

She looked him straight in the eye and deigned no reply. And suddenly he knew that there was nothing which he could say. There was nothing he could do with her. He had his own suspicions, which he felt to be founded upon a very Gibraltar of certainty, but those suspicions were of no use to him in any court of law.

He loosed her arm and stepped away from her.

"Go back to your room, then, and pack up your things, and get out of this house. Because I more than suspect that you're a member of the filthy crew that is haunting the old place, and if I have another day to work on you, it may be hanging business. Do you hear me? Believe what I say, because I mean it!"

She gave him a murderous side glance and then walked slowly past him and through the doorway.

He, thoroughly dissatisfied with himself, began to pace up and down the floor. He never should have left that girl alone with a slow-handed fool like Aunt Maggie. Once she was gone, he should have raced downstairs and tried to find trace of her near the house. And as a result of this whole evening's work he simply knew that Francesca the beautiful was connected with the fiendish work that went on at the O'Mallock house, and that even the cook, Aunt Maggie, might have a part in it.

Then, gloomily, he settled himself for his night's vigil.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AUNT MAGGIE IN.

IN the morning he was amazed to see Aunt Maggie enter the library with his breakfast tray. He was amazed; he was angered, too.

"You're going to try to stay on and bluff it out?" said he. "Aunt Maggie, it will be a black day for you, I promise you!"

She turned on him in sudden heat.

"Mr. Weldon," said she, "right from now on, I don't want no more words with you. You're nothing but a barkin' dog, and I don't fear your bite none whatever!"

With that she swept almost majestically from the room, leaving him more angered, more bewildered than ever. More bewildered, because he had not expected such calm self-assurance from the cook; angered, because it was the clearest proof of his impotence that the only way he could strike at her was to talk frankly with the one person to whom he wished to reveal not a thing.

He held his own counsel until mid-morning, when Doctor Henry Watts came to the house; and then he greeted the doctor with an almost sardonic courtesy.

"You look a little pinched, my dear boy," said the doctor gently, and he patted the heavy shoulder of Weldon almost affectionately. "Now, you must turn in and really sleep to-day. I'll take charge of my dear Helen. Is there any news?"

Weldon looked vaguely at him. "News?" he said. "Oh, nothing of much importance."

"Good," said the doctor, "I was right from the first moment. I knew that once a formidable person like you had come to the house, the others would not dare to come near it! They're afraid of you, Weldon. They know about you, and they're wonderfully afraid of you!"

"In fact," said Weldon, "they're not paying any particular attention to me or to any other living man. They're more interested in the dead!"

"Dead?" said the doctor, falling back a pace.

"The dead!" said Weldon.

The doctor moved back close toward

the door, his lips parted, and his frightened eyes were fixed upon Weldon.

"You need rest," he said in a voice that was very uncertain. "You've been going without sleep too long, Weldon. I insist that you turn in now and sleep the clock around. I'll take care of everything here!"

He made a fine, large gesture, and Weldon smiled a little.

"I mean the general when I speak about the dead," said Weldon.

"Ah? Ah?" said the other.

"The general, lying out there dead in his grave. Is that clear?"

"Clear and horrible! Horrible and clear!" said Henry Watts. "Good heavens, Weldon, what do you mean?"

"That they've taken the body of the general out of its grave and spirited it away!"

The doctor clasped his old, heavily veined hands together.

"Taken—the—dead body—away!" he echoed. "But, Weldon, Weldon, who are they?"

"I wish I knew!" said Weldon through his teeth. "Ah, I wish with all my heart that I knew! Because if I did, I'd go on their trail, and I'd be on that trail for the sake of the fight that I could get out of it. I'm growing a little excited, doctor. You're right when you say that, and I intend to use a gun freely. I'm going to sprinkle this case with lead the way a man sprinkles fresh meat with salt, before I'm through!"

"The general's body!" said the doctor, his slow, old brain reverting to that fact. "But how could they?"

"By cutting the irons that hold down the slab of stone," said Weldon shortly, "and then by lifting the body out and carting it off. That's how it could be done!"

"And the grave lies open!" gasped the doctor.

"The grave is closed as neatly as ever," said Weldon. "There was more than half a chance that we never would notice what had happened!"

"Ah, Weldon, and how did you chance to notice what had happened?"

"Because I went there to do the same thing."

"The same thing?"

"I went there to have an autopsy performed on that body, because I have a very good idea that the general died of poison, Doctor Watts!"

The doctor turned white and dropped into a chair.

"Good Heaven!" he breathed in the most helpless voice.

"There's no Heaven in it," said Weldon. "The fiend is running the affairs of this house! Doctor go in and give Miss O'Mallock a stimulant that will give her strength for an hour or so."

"What do you mean?" said the doctor, still white, and now trembling violently, as these ideas overwhelmed him.

"Because I have some things to tell her that may almost shake the soul out of her body."

"Weldon," cried the doctor, "I can't permit it! Heavens, what is happening! The world is gone mad! My brain spins! And now you want to subject my poor dear Helen to such a shock as this?"

Weldon said simply: "You've been in charge here for some time. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you've made a mess of things. Now you're going to do as I tell you. Go to her at once and give her something to steady her, and then let me know when I can come in."

"Very well," said Henry Watts and, standing up, he went meekly toward the room of Helen O'Mallock.

Weldon heard the knock, heard the old fellow enter the room, and the soft click as the door was closed. Then he sat down and waited for almost half an hour before Aunt Maggie swept through—evidently summoned by the bell.

She gave Weldon a look not of hostility, he thought, but rather of curiosity and interest, as though she wondered what he might be able to do next, and his color rose a little. It was very odd! Certainly he must have fallen off from the man he used to be if he was unable to strike a little awe into the heart of an old negress, no matter how deep in crime she might be.

Aunt Maggie went and came again, hooking her thumb over her shoulder, while she jerked her head at Weldon and said briefly:

"She can see you now, white man!"

He gave her a scowl, rather childish in his pettishness, and went on toward the room of Helen O'Mallock.

The door was ajar. As he came closer, he heard her voice, always a little husky and low-pitched, but now speaking cheerfully with Doctor Watts; and when he opened the door he found her sitting in the full flash of the morning sun, a great straw hat with a huge, flapping brim drawn down on her head. It left her face quite in shadow, but the golden hair shone like metal in this radiance.

She smiled her good morning to Weldon. The doctor rose and hovered around her with a sort of maternal anxiety.

"You want to talk to Helen?" he said to Weldon. "I don't suppose you mind if I stay with her?"

"Oh, of course not," said Helen gently, smiling up to him.

"I have to talk to you alone," said Weldon. "I'll see you later," he added to Watts.

And the doctor, still hesitant, went to the door, fumbled at the handle of it, and then left in jerky haste, as though he were driving himself.

Weldon waited until the latch had clicked. Then he sat down in the chair opposite the girl. Her hands were folded in her lap. In spite of himself, he could not raise his eyes at once to her face, but dwelt on the crystal pallor of those slender fingers, through which the sun seemed shining with a rosy glow.

At last he forced himself to terseness.

"I've come to talk seriously and in a way that is going to upset you," he said. "Are you prepared to be shocked?"

"I think I am," said she. "Is it something about you?"

"It's about you, and your own affairs," said he. "I've wanted to keep these things to myself. But I can't. I have to have more authority in this house to act as I think fit, or else I'm not worth a pinch of salt to you."

"Do you want me to change doctors?" said she anxiously. "Is that it?"

"I want you to send Aunt Maggie away."

She looked at him with childish wonder.

"But how could I ever live without Aunt Maggie?" said she.

CHAPTER XXV.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

WELDON stopped to reconsider. He had come full of a sort of stern purposefulness to tell her his mind, but seated in the chair opposite her, he hesitated, and looked more closely beneath the shadow which her broad-brimmed hat cast. He could not help remembering, at that moment, the scornful remark which Wilbur had made, that no woman could be beautiful unless there were a certain amount of the glow of strength in her.

So it seemed now with Helen O'Mallock; for there was doubtless the glow in her face. A strange glow, contrasted with the pallor of her hands, and their slender feebleness. But he wished that he could banish the sun which shone upon her, for it was difficult to decide what portion was the actual radiance of

Helen O'Mallock, and what part was due to the reflection of the light of the strong sun, filtered through the translucent brim of the straw hat.

Her very smile, in these conditions, seemed rather different. It was not altogether the childishly innocent thing which he always had thought it before. It had a suggestion of cynical amusement, as she lay there, watching him.

So strongly did this thought grow upon him that he scowled violently at the floor to banish the illusion.

She had been waiting all this time for him to speak but, at his frown, she leaned forward a little.

"You're angry about something. You're not pleased with me," she said.

He glanced up again. Her lips were parted, and he could see that they were trembling a little with anxiety as she watched him. All the doubts of Weldon fled away.

"I was only thinking where I could make the best start," he said.

She nodded and smiled a little, to encourage him, and he could not help thinking what a strangely pathetic smile it was. She, young, beautiful, wealthy, fitted to have the world of strong men at her feet; but robbed of her wealth by scoundrels, and soon to be robbed of all her beauty by cold death—and so reduced to him!

Dark passages out of his life rushed back upon his mind. Bitterly he despised himself, and what he had felt for her before this moment—gentle affection, pity, kindly devotion—now was transferred at a stroke and changed to worship, to self-immolating sacrifice, to boundless passion for service.

"Then I'll begin with a name. Francesca Laguarda," said he. "What do you know about her?"

"Francesca Laguarda?" she said. "Francesca Laguarda? But I know her very well, of course! Why, she went to my school! She was in my year. Why, I know all about her!"

It stirred his heart to hear her speak so. He leaned forward a litttle and planted his elbows on his knees.

"You know all about her?"

"Oh, yes."

"What was she, then?"

"Was she?" cried the girl, her soft, husky voice raised a little. "Is Francesca——"

"Ah, no, not dead!" he said in haste. "I didn't mean that. But what I wanted to know was—well—who are her parents?"

"Ah, poor Francesca!" said Helen O'Mallock. "They died when she was quite young, I think. She never knew them. She grew up rather by herself. I mean to say—other people raised her. Strangers, almost."

He nodded. That description of her early life fitted perfectly into what he could imagine about her past. He felt, with a hot rush of championship, that if she had had the proper opportunities, if she had been surrounded by the right environment for a young girl, surely she would have been able to grow into a pure and perfect maidenhood—even like this of Helen O'Mallock!

The comparison was fatal. He bowed his head again. No, this strange night flower, this beautiful and wild girl never could have been like Helen O'Mallock!

"Does that make you sad also?" asked Helen.

"No, no!" said he. "No, no!"

But his eye wandered wildly.

"Do *you* know Francesca?" she asked with eagerness.

"I don't know her," said he. "I was almost beginning to think that nobody knew her, but you say you did?"

"Oh, yes," said she. "I was her roommate, you know!"

"Ah, yes. And that made you know her?"

He added, as she stared a little: "I mean to say, that there are some people one could live with for ten years, side

by side, and still one wouldn't know them really!"

"Are there such people?" she asked innocently. "I've never happened to meet any like that!"

He bit his lip. He would not have changed her, of course. No, she was perfect as she was, and not a line nor a color of her character should be altered. Nevertheless, it would have been very useful to him in this moment if he could have learned a little more about Francesca from a companion of a more worldly nature.

"No doubt you never have," he said, as gently as possible. "But I have. But tell me, Helen, what would you say about Francesca?"

She looked at him and then above and beyond him.

"I don't know," she answered. "It's hard to put people into words."

"Why, we could go stage by stage. Was she beautiful or plain, for instance?"

"Ah, most people said that she was beautiful. Very beautiful, most people said."

"But what did you think, Helen?"

"I don't know. I never thought a great deal about her looks."

"And why not? I mean to say, one generally has a pretty strong impression about the looks of a person one is constantly with. How long were you with her?"

"Two years."

"As a roommate?"

"Yes. Always. We never would have any other."

"And yet you never had an opinion about her looks?"

"Yes. I thought she was handsome, of course. One could see that. She had regular features, you know."

"Regular features!" breathed Weldon. "Regular features! Didn't you see that she was a most heavenly and sky-towering beauty?"

"Such a beauty as all that?" gasped Helen O'Mallock. "No. I never thought that. It seems that you know her very well?"

"No, no!" said Weldon.

But suddenly he was so stirred, remembering the loveliness of that face, and the fragrance of her, and the dangerous elegance, and strength, and swiftness of her body that he had to leave his chair and take a pace or two about the room, for otherwise he would not have been able to keep his countenance at all before the sick girl.

She was watching him all the time.

"Ah," she said slowly, judicially, "but I think that you *do* know her rather well, after all!"

He made a brief, fierce gesture.

"I don't want to talk about myself and her," he said. "Beautiful, heaven knows she is. But now, tell me what else you thought about her. Was she —in short—a good girl?"

"I have an idea," said Helen O'Mallock, "that you have found her a very good girl."

He looked sharply at her, startled. There could be no doubt that she was smiling at him. Yes, and smiling openly, a little. As though she began to read him, and keep the knowledge to herself.

At that, he went to her and leaned a little above her.

"You can read my very shallow secret," he said. "I haven't kept it well at all. But I tell you, and I swear to you, that what I think of her has nothing to do with what I ask you. I want your honest opinion. Was she honest?"

Helen O'Mallock slightly turned her head. The smile was still on her lips, a little thoughtful and a little sad.

"I don't think that I could say she was honest," she admitted at last.

"Not honest? Did she, for instance, ever deceive you?"

A sort of anger came into the face and the voice of the girl as she answered: "Yes, yes, yes! Sometimes I

used to think that her chief delight in the world was in deceiving me!"

He drew in a great breath. It was a very damaging thing that he had heard. He could not stay still under it, but again he walked the room. It was well enough for such a girl as Francesca Laguarda to deceive others—strong spirits—men. But to deceive this angel, this not-yet-risen spirit—that marked her very blackly indeed!

"She deceived you?"

"Yes."

"Almost as if she enjoyed deceiving you?"

"Yes. I don't want to hurt your feelings——"

"Forget me!" said Weldon, his great voice reduced to softness, but with a vibration that made the whole room tremble with its violence. "I want you to speak as if I never had laid eyes upon her!"

"Yes," said Helen O'Mallock obediently. But she seemed to be frightened and, lying back in her chair, she watched her guardian with awe-stricken eyes.

"How did she deceive you?" said he, his voice rough again.

"Why—I hardly know how to put it. Yes, I do. She liked to pretend that she was nothing but good. That there was no evil in her. She even liked to pretend that men made no difference to her. But all the while, that wasn't true. I used to believe her for a long time. And then, gradually, I began to see that she couldn't live unless she had the admiration of men. I saw it by degrees, you know!"

"But isn't that hardly more than natural for a girl?" he answered. "Isn't it——"

He checked himself with an effort. He had come here to find out what truth he could about this wild woman he loved, and now he was shielding himself from the knowledge of the facts and trying to prove not that she was bad, but that at any rate, she was good enough for him!

CHAPTER XXVI.

TO NO PURPOSE.

HE was thoroughly ashamed, when he saw this. And particularly when he asked the next question:

"What else did you have against her?"

"I haven't anything against her," said Helen O'Mallock faintly. "And I hope that I'm not displeasing you!"

"Displeasing me? Nonsense!" said Weldon.

He spoke the last word under his breath, but he was very afraid that she had heard it.

"What has my pleasure to do with the matter. I'm asking you for the facts."

She raised her handkerchief to her lips. Above the handkerchief, he could see that her eyes were very big, and rather hurt.

"Tell me," he said suddenly, "this woman——"

"Do you mean Francesca?" she asked gently.

"Yes, yes. I mean her. What was she to you?"

"I don't know how I should answer that."

"You say she was your friend?"

"Oh, yes."

"A good friend?"

"Yes."

"Your best friend, perhaps?"

Helen turned her eyes away and then nodded, almost reluctantly, as he thought.

"I suppose that she was."

"And did she steal your affection, Helen?"

"I don't mean to say that!"

"I'm not asking you to defend yourself," he assured her. "I want you to take this easily, to speak only the truth, to care for nothing except to tell the

truth exactly as you see it. Are you afraid?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Of me?"

"Yes!"

"Confound it," said Weldon, half through his teeth, "don't you see that I'm not here to torment you, and that I'm only asking you these questions because I have to? Can't you see that, Helen?"

She paused. He saw her swallow.

"Yes!" she said.

He gripped his hands hard and turned away from her. He was enormously moved. In part because he felt that the naked, terrible truth about the girl he loved was being revealed to him —yes, and standing more dark and awful as compared with the bright and angelic clearness of this child's nature.

He could hardly look upon her as more than a child. And, like a child, she was rebelling against this torment that he imposed upon her.

"Then answer me without any trembling. I see that you're trembling, Helen."

"I can't help it," said she. "I don't want to tremble. I want to be very brave."

"Then what unnerves you?"

"It's you," said the poor girl. "You look so terribly upset and—and scourged by everything that I say!"

"I'm not," said Weldon, fuming at his lack of ability to act a part. "I'm not at all. As a matter of fact, I'm——"

He paused and looked miserably at her.

"I've thrown away the thought of her, except as a curiosity, and because I have to find out about her for other reasons!"

There was a little intaken breath; Helen O'Mallock looked on him almost with horror.

"But I don't want to make her out too bad!" she said.

"Of course you don't! But she lived with you all those years and still she took her pleasure in deceiving you!"

She folded her hands together, tried to answer, and failed. She could only look at him with great eyes of remorse.

"I haven't wanted to hurt you," she said.

"Helen!" he cried at her. "How could you hurt me? What strength is there in you to hurt a huge hulk like me? Now be reasonable and don't talk foolishly. This Francesca Laguarda, you agree with me—she's bad."

"I haven't said so!"

"Ah, you haven't said so!"

"I've told you, instead, that she was my best friend. But I admitted that she had a few faults, because you wanted to know!"

"I wanted to know," said he sadly. "I hoped against hope that perhaps you could wash her clean. But I see that you can't. Don't argue about it. Let's be simple, clear, and frank with one another. Now I'm going to tell you what I know: That Francesca Laguarda has been at this house, or near it, trying to do you some injury."

"Francesca?"

"Yes."

"But not Francesca!"

"Yes, yes. Beautiful, beautiful, Francesca!"

"But how could she be here, when she's in Italy?"

"Are you sure of that?"

"Ah, yes. She wrote to me less than six months ago!"

"Where was she then?"

"In Verona."

"Perhaps she was there. Perhaps it's a good idea of hers to keep moving rather briskly about the world. But now, Helen, I'm going to speak to you frankly. Will you try to believe that what I say is true?"

"Yes, yes!"

She was pale with excitement, her hands knotted. He could see her breast rising and falling with her emotion.

"Then I have to tell you this—that Francesca Laguarda is the most thoroughly dangerous woman on the face of the earth!"

"How could she be, and be so——"

"Beautiful, do you mean?"

"I——"

"Well, yes. Beautiful she is. So beautiful that the thought of her makes my head swim, and that when I stand here, Helen, there is a darkness shooting before my eyes, and I want with all my heart to cry out: 'It's not possible or true. She's not wrong. She's right, and in the end I can prove that she's a good woman!'"

And the girl answered him with a sudden ring of warmth in her voice:

"Ah, and you've said it, and I believe that you can!"

He shook his head in disbelief at her statement.

"There's no hope in this world for her. I assure you of that. But now, Helen, I want you to know that this girl is trying hard to injure you—that she has been here—that she was here last night!"

"Ah!" gasped Helen O'Mallock.

He answered the incredulity of her voice: "I've seen her, I've touched her. I've carried her into this house. And then——"

He paused, overwhelmed by what seemed to him his incredible folly: "And then I left her for a few moments under the care of Aunt Maggie—and, of course, in those few moments the wily creature beguiled the negress and was able to escape!"

Still Helen O'Mallock could not answer.

"And as for the negress, she acted in such a way that I was sure she had had her own shady experience in life. She carried off the part too well. Like a professional. And I've seen enough of the criminal world to recognize the criminal professional touch!"

He paused and immediately went on: "You have to get away from Aunt Maggie!"

"But how?" said Helen O'Mallock. "How could I drive her out of the house?"

"You don't have to drive her out of the house. You have to leave the house yourself."

He continued, as she gaped at him: "The doctor will take you away. Thank goodness for an honest man in the world, even if he's not the strongest. Honesty is better than a regiment of soldiers!"

"Ah, it is, it is!" she agreed with a broken voice.

"You have to leave here and go away with the doctor. And I'll stay behind and watch the place."

"I can't let you do that!"

"And why not, then?"

"Because, what would I have to say to myself afterward, when I knew that you were in danger here?

"I shall be in no danger. How could I be?"

"If Francesca came here to threaten me—then there are others. A woman would not try to do such a thing alone."

He saw that she was reasoning closely to the point, and he was anxious to close the argument. He tried sheer force.

"Helen, here is a case where you must stop trying to work out what is right and wrong. You must do what you are told to do. You must leave this house!"

He added gently:

"You must go away to some much brighter place, where there will be a chance for you to find real happiness—where there are no shadows under the sun; a dry climate that will be good for you, with the doctor to take care of you—and let me stay behind here to try to untangle this snarl in your affairs. I'd ask nothing better than that!"

She watched him with eyes which, as he knew at once, hardly saw him. They were looking at ideas behind him—the

great ideas, perhaps, which overmastered Weldon himself.

"I never could leave," she said finally, "I never could say good-by to Aunt Maggie. I never could doubt Francesca. You never will understand. No doubt you are right, and no doubt I am wrong. I admit that I'm weak. But I haven't the strength to start doubting now—the few people who have been true to me. That's why I can't talk any more. I want to stay here. I want—to die here—in this house—believing in things, you know——"

Her voice trailed away. The weakness of which she spoke came over her. And he thought that the color was brushed from her face. It was the sun going behind a cloud, stealing the glow from her features.

He knew that there was no purpose in arguing or commanding. He had done his utmost, and she had given him her confession of faith. He simply backed from the room. He was crushed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PUZZLED.

THIS much he could put down in black and white: Francesca was a thoroughly bad one. Helen was a sainted spirit from heaven. And the battle must be fought out with the poor girl on the battleground.

In the library he found the doctor biting his mustache nervously.

"Well, well?" he asked.

"I failed," said Weldon.

"Ah, of course you failed! I knew that you'd fail. But I mean: how is she? Is she well? Did you upset her too much?"

"I don't know," answered Weldon, and sank into a chair with a sigh of despair, while the doctor trotted hastily away.

He came back in due time, looking even more grave than usual.

"You'll have to mend your methods while you're in this house," said he, and shook his head at Weldon.

"How is she?"

"Stretched out in bed. Very weak. Heart hammering at a high rate. Another touch or two like that——"

He glowered at Weldon from the corner of his eyes and went to the window, where he stood rocking back and forth from heel to toe, and flipping out the tails of his coat in his indignation.

Weldon smiled. Indignation in the little old fellow was something like fury in a poodle! Then he stood up from his chair.

"At any rate, I'm no good without a bit of sleep," said he. "You can go in and watch beside her. I'm going to have a few winks."

The doctor agreed with his usual amiability to this, and Weldon fell down on the couch in the library and closed his eyes. He was instantly asleep and remained so until the softest of touches fell upon his ankles and then upon his throat. He looked up and saw the retreating back of Aunt Maggie, waddling softly from the room. She had covered him with a downy blanket.

He mused upon this, very startled. For there was assuredly a state of war existing between them, and yet she had chosen to do him good in secret, and that was not the way that he had expected from her. The thought led him onto other broodings. Nothing ever would explain women to him, really. Nothing, for instance, would have prepared him for that last speech from Helen O'Mallock. Unless, indeed, there is a strength of passivity in even the weakest of creatures.

That last speech had told him something which even Doctor Watts did not know about her—that she expected death, and expected it so soon that she hardly cared what became of her so long as she could cling to the old actualities of her poor, starved life until the finish came.

These thoughts so thoroughly upset him that he could not close his eyes again.

For a time he sat up on the couch, turning vague thoughts through his mind, but reaching no conclusion. At last his restlessness drove him out of the house. He wandered for a time up the hillside, past the desecrated tomb of the general, and as he passed it, he paused and wondered if of right he should have told Helen O'Mallock what had happened in this instance. That might, perhaps, have been the incident which would have turned her definitely against the house and decided her on leaving the place for happier surroundings. Yet he felt sure, on second thought, that not even this would have moved her. She had made up her mind resolutely, and nothing could disturb her inward conviction.

He turned down the hills through the pines.

It was the rich prime of the day. The sun burned like the flare from the opened door of an electric furnace when he passed into the full blast of it; the very shadows beneath the trees were warm and drowsy and brought back his lack of sleep to him He began to look about him for a place where he could find a pleasant couch and so sleep away an hour or two before he returned to that grim vigil within the house of the O'Mallocks.

Here the ground was too rough. And there pine needles had not fallen thickly enough. And so he went casually on, his senses quite asleep, until he had come to a little distance beneath the house. How easy it is to wander, when one walks downhill!

So thought Weldon, and turned for a moment to regard the towering eastern face of the house, ranging far above the tallest treetops. He had been a moment in this manner, standing fast, when a stir among the lower brush beneath him made him jerk his head around in time to see a man glide out from the shadows.

He stepped softly within the shelter of a broad trunk. There was a stumble and a snarl at the same instant, and then the sound of two men in dialogue.

"The ground is slippery as ice, with the needles! I'm gunna break my neck to-day!"

"Keep your head up, and stop talking," said an answering voice.

"There ain't anybody near us."

"How d'you know?"

"Listen for yourself, you poor sap. D'you hear anything but that squirrel crackin' a nut up yonder?"

"I tell you," said the other, in a voice so guarded that Weldon hardly could make out the words, "there might be somebody right behind that broken-backed pine this minute."

"Well, let's have a look!"

And Weldon, looking up, saw that the tree behind which he had sheltered himself swerved sharply to the side from the straight line, and thus must have filled the description which had been applied.

He slipped a gun into his hand and waited with straining eyes and ears.

"You poor fool," said the other speaker, "I don't mean that tree in particular. I mean, he's likely to be anywhere!"

"Who?"

"Who have we got to watch for in this here job?"

"Aw, I dunno. You mean Weldon?"

"Who else *would* I mean?"

"Dang Weldon! I ain't afraid of any man!"

"You darn near turned yaller the other night, though!"

"Oh, that? That ain't the kind of work that I'm cut out for. I don't like it?"

"A job of shootin' in the back would please you more."

"Look here, 'Slim,' I ain't on the job to take side talk from you!" said he

who had been accused of showing the white feather. "What's more, I ain't gunna have it!"

"Have it or be danged," said the companion. "I say that you welched on me!"

"I ain't a gravedigger, and I never set out to be!"

Weldon started so violently that he was afraid he had made a noise.

"What in heck *do* you set out to be?"

"I'll leave that for my boss to decide."

"You've come along with me pretty pronto to-day to claim your share of the coin."

"I was on the job," said the other stubbornly, "and I get my full split or I'll raise a row."

"We'll talk about that later."

"What's the way in?"

"I'll show you. Come along. You've talked enough to tell the squirrels. Now, mind you, walk soft and talk soft. Better still, don't talk at all. This Weldon is everywhere. And he's poison. The big boss says so, and she ought to know."

"She!" How vastly much that word spelled to Weldon under the circumstances, for to his mind it could mean none other than beautiful Francesca Laguarda!

He ventured a glance around the corner of the tree and saw the pair walking carefully on toward the eastern face of the house.

"She!"

There was no better time than now to stop them!

His mind was made up immediately. "Halt!" said Weldon, and stepped from behind his shelter.

The one was a tall, powerfully built man. The other was a slender, thin-shouldered fellow. And yet he had been the one who had talked the more boldly of the pair and had spoken of his comrade's "welching."

Now, as they heard his voice, he expected them to whirl about, gun in hand, since they were that breed.

Instead, the short one yipped like a frightened rabbit: "It's him!"

And they leaped away for shelter, the tall fellow turning to the left and the other to the right, diving for the shade of the brush.

Their swinging to two sides threw Weldon a little off balance. He fired instinctively at the taller of the pair.

Both disappeared at the same instant. There was only a stifled curse in the air to tell Weldon that he had struck his man or had, at least, come perilously close to the mark.

He leaped on, regardless of their chance to turn, in shelter, and riddle him with bullets as he advanced. But no gun sounded. He burst through the screen of brush and the house was before him, with no man in sight.

He turned to the right, thinking that he had heard a sound like the grinding of a pebble under foot in that direction. Sprinting hard, they might have reached and turned the corner of the house in that way. He in turn ran as fast as he could, his gun always ready, and so turned the corner, teeth set for action—and saw nothing whatever!

He went on, still sprinting hard, and turned the second corner to the rear, with the long stretch of the patio wall before him. But still there was no sight of any fugitive.

He stopped to a walk, and began to retrace his steps. It was very odd, indeed!

He made a swift detour, then through the brush beneath the house thinking that they might have managed in some way, to dodge back. But there was no sign of them. Then, taking slower and surer measures, he began to examine the ground. It was fairly soft in patches, and following it with care, he finally distinguished their footmarks. He saw where they had dodged behind the brush. He followed and discovered

that their footmarks converged and finally came together right under the wall of the house.

He examined the ground to either side most carefully. It was rock or hard gravel, but it did not seem that two hard-running men could have passed over it so recently without making a mark upon it. And yet there was not a token on either side!

At last he raised his puzzled eyes to the wall itself. What secret did it inclose?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"DO IT AT ONCE."

HE took up a good-sized stone and with this he tapped a number of times against the wall, holding his ear close to it, in the hope that he would be able to detect a hollow sound, significant of a passage within, for it began to seem to him that the pair must, really, have disappeared through the solid masonry. However, that was a bit too fanciful to suit him; it savored a great deal too much of "Arabian Nights" and fairy tales. Therefore, he shook his head over the puzzle and went on back to the house.

It was the second mysterious disappearance.

Pausing under the window of the library, he scanned carefully the greenery of the vines that climbed up the wall, but he was unable to see any place where they had been bruised, as by hand or foot. How else could that wild girl, Francesca Laguarda, have managed to escape from that room?

He gritted his teeth over the renewed problem which was brought up by the disappearance of the two he had overheard approaching the house.

Unless they were most miraculously quick of foot, into the wall they must have faded. Or else, with wonderful courage and adroitness, they had managed to slip silently into the brush, and so avoid him.

He was doubtful about their ability to accomplish such a feat. The brush was dry. There were plenty of twigs and fallen leaves upon the ground, and altogether that pair did not seem of the kind who would possess woodcraft. They had to Weldon all the earmarks of common or garden city crooks, such as he had known by the gross.

"The rank and file," as Wilbur was used to say with his sneer.

Deep in those reflections, he climbed the stairs and reëntered the library which he had left such a short time before. The doctor was there, and looked up from a newspaper with a cheerful, dim-eyed smile.

"She's sleeping, dear child!" said he.

Weldon grunted.

With the burden of these problems upon him, the doctor was a most unwelcome presence to him. Weldon merely nodded and went on from the library toward his own room.

"I thought I heard a shot," said the doctor with unusual calmness.

"I took a pop at a squirrel," said Weldon, and went on.

He sat down on the edge of his bed, his face between his hands, his brain whirling. In every way he had been checkmated. He had arrived at the desperate measure of having the body of the general exhumed and an autopsy performed; and the body had been stolen away the very night, as it seemed, that he was about to do the work.

Then there was good proof of this, circumstantially, in the appearance of those two rascals in the woods—they who were coming to be paid.

By whom? By Francesca, of course! And that meant either that she had not left the place at all, or else that she would return to it.

This deduction reduced Weldon to actual despair. If ever he had his hands upon her again, it would go very hard if she should escape from him the second time. He would keep her and

use means to wring her secrets from her!

In all that he had done, he felt that he had acted as wisely as possible except, perhaps, in revealing his suspicions to Helen O'Mallock. But surely he had meant that for the best, and how could he have dreamed that she would be so sadly set on taking whatever fate offered to her?

Staring moodily at the floor, his gaze finally centered on a little round spot of red, as big as a man's finger nail. Very red it was, standing out against the darker surface of the varnish. It made him so curious that he reached down, half absent-mindedly, and touched it with the tip of a finger.

When he looked again, half the spot was gone, and the finger-tip was brightest crimson, blood-red, indeed.

Weldon was startled from his dream. Blood-red? Why, it was blood in very fact! And who had been dripping blood on the floor of his bedroom?

He went to the library door.

"Doctor Watts?"

"Well, well, well, my boy!" said that worthy old gentleman, blinking his glasses off the bridge of his nose so that they slid halfway down to the tip of it. "You startled me! I was just reading a very interesting account of a new discovery they've made at Capua——"

"Darn Capua!" said the impolite Weldon. "How long have you been sitting there?"

"Only a few moments. Half an hour, perhaps."

"In fact, you stayed only a moment in her room?"

"She was sleepy. Sleep is the best medicine, you know, and I always feel that if we could learn true relaxation, true sleep, there never would be the slightest need for——"

Weldon, more impolite than ever, slammed the door in the doctor's face and went back to his study of the blood. He went crouching here and there across the chamber, spying at every inch of the boards and making a special scrutiny of the rugs, for one of these, to be sure, might have received a similar drop. If he could find no more than a single one, it would show much—it would show in what direction the wounded man had gone.

For he had not the slightest doubt that this blood came from the wound which he had inflicted upon one of the precious pair among the pines beneath the house.

At last he found what he wanted—an even larger splotch, and it lay upon the floor just opposite the room of Helen O'Mallock. Exactly in front of her door it had fallen!

It fairly stopped the heart of Weldon to find such a proof! But how had it come there? Had the fugitive fled into the room where the girl was lying? Had he, perhaps, stifled her before she could make an outcry, while the doctor sat in the library, his ears stuffed with the recent discovery at Capua?

Where was Capua, anyway?

He listened for an instant at the crack of the door. Then he opened it softly—and, more amazed than ever, he found himself looking into the wide eyes of Helen O'Mallock.

She was badly frightened, apparently, though the fear in her eyes changed at once to a smile of recognition and pleasure.

"Helen, have you seen something here in your room?" he asked, looking eagerly around him.

"I saw the door open stealthily, just now," said the girl. "It frightened me almost to death!"

"How long have you been awake?"

"Half a minute, perhaps, before that door began to open. I woke up with my heart racing. I—I'm so glad it was only you!"

"Tell me—who did you think it might have been?"

"Well, you see, if there are people

who want to get rid of me from this house—they might not wait until——"

Here she paused—and dropped her head so that the broad shadow of the hat screened her face.

"I beg your pardon," said she, faintly. "I shouldn't speak of that!"

The heart of Weldon was softened within him. He went to her and took her hand in his, and the coldness and the smallness of it struck a chill through him.

"You should speak to me of anything that comes into your mind," he told her. "You should speak to me of anything and of everything. I am part of you, like an extra hand, say, and you must use me. I know what you meant to say. Ah, well—if I could take you away from this place——"

"But what would you do with me?"

"I thought that I would stay behind and watch the house—but I've changed my mind. There's nothing in this house that really matters except you. I tell you, Helen, I'd bring you to a place where no enemy could follow you. I'd sleep like a dog outside your door. I'd be living in your shadow. I'd keep you safe and, by heaven, I'd find a way of pouring some of my strength into you and making you strong again, also!"

She looked at him with the oddest of smiles, and the most gentle. Partly as if she were amused, a little, by this boyish enthusiasm, this boyish surety, promising miracles where science had failed to help her. And partly she smiled like one already beyond this world and passed into the dim verge of shadows.

He withdrew to the doorway, and there he thought of suggesting to her that he should be allowed to search her room. But a sort of holy awe came over him, such as he had felt before, when he was in her presence.

He turned away, and then he went back to the library to find the doctor sitting bolt upright and shaking his beard over some article which greatly excited him.

When he became aware of Weldon, he cried out: "They have it. They really have it at last!"

"They have what?" asked Weldon grimly.

"The missing arm, of course."

"Of what?"

"She wasn't holding a baby at all," said the doctor, wagging his head, and at last looking up to Weldon with the broadest of grins. "She wasn't holding a baby at all. She was holding a mirror!"

He laughed with great pleasure.

"It wasn't a Latona at all! Not a bit of it. I always knew that it wasn't a Latona! As a matter of fact, it was a Venus. The idiots might have known that long ago, if they had paid attention to a little article which I published as long as eight years ago in the——"

"Doctor Watts!" said Weldon.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Doctor Watts. "You shock me—like an electric current—half a dozen times a day. I wish that you could manage to speak to me without taking my breath away!"

"I want to wake you up, if I can," said Weldon.

"Ah, true, true," said the doctor. "As the years advance, I often feel a somnolence which increases in the——"

"Watts, there's blood on the floor of my bedroom!"

"Good heavens!" said the doctor. "I assure you I didn't put it there!"

Weldon gritted his teeth.

"Some one who came out of the door of her room let that blood fall in passing through mine. Do you understand?"

"Upon my soul!" breathed Doctor Watts. "I don't understand at all!"

"Try to, then. You heard a gun pop a little time ago?"

"Yes, yes!"

"I told you I was shooting at a squirrel. I wasn't, however."

"Ah, at a bird, perhaps? There is an old crow which often perches on the——"

"This bird was a man," said Weldon. "I shot at him as he dodged, and I heard him cry out. Apparently I wounded him. Perhaps in an arm as he jumped to the side. He and the man with him disappeared between the edge of the trees and the wall of the house—the eastern wall, you understand?"

"Upon my soul!" cried the doctor. "Disappeared? My dear lad, there are certain laws of nature and of science which really must be——"

"Be quiet," said Weldon wearily, "and listen to what I have to say. There is a passage from the lower part of that wall to the room of Helen O'Mallock, and every moment that she spends in that room—which we have been guarding so carefully!—is a moment spent in the hands of her enemies! Now will you do what I want you to do?"

"I!" gasped the doctor. "I? Weldon, you overwhelm me. I simply don't——"

"You don't have to. All you have to do is what I tell you to do, and I'll make that as simple as possible. Go to Helen O'Mallock and persuade her out of her room. Get her out and keep her out. I want to examine the walls and the floor of that place!"

"Do you want me to use force?" asked the doctor faintly.

"Tell her that the room has a draft—that the floor is too damp—do something. That's all I say. Do something and do it at once. We can't waste any more time!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CRUDE LITTLE TRAP.

THE doctor went toward the door, feeling his way from chair to chair, so overwhelmed was he by this announcement. Weldon overtook him and shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"Look here," said he, "are you going to go in to her with a face like a death mask? Brace up—cheer yourself a little. She's had enough nerve strain to-day. Put it all gently. We must get her moved out at once!"

He went over by the window of the library and half closed his eyes. He could almost have smiled, now, for since he had a definite thread to follow, he swore to himself that he would follow that thread until it led to a hempen rope large enough to hang a thief and murderer!

He waited for long moments, and then the doctor came in, shaking his head.

"Wait one moment," said Weldon. "I think you're going to tell me that you haven't persuaded her? If that's the case, turn on your heel and go back to her room again!"

The doctor drew himself up stiff and straight. It added actual inches to his height, and his old, filmed-over eyes gleamed with real fire.

"Young man," said he, "I like you, I even esteem you. You have strength, courage, and devotion to a good cause. But I want to remind you that there are some things in life which all the stampings and bellowings of a bull are powerless to effect! I shall not return to the room of that weary, tormented child to persuade her. She has consented to move from her room to-morrow. Isn't that enough for you?"

Weldon smiled, his teeth set hard.

"And leave her another night in that danger? A door open to the world?"

"What chance is there that she will be disturbed by them to-night? How many nights has she lain there without being troubled?"

There was point to this, and the doctor spoke the words so sharply that Weldon felt himself subdued a little, particularly when Henry Watts continued: "She has been under a great strain to-day. Who placed that strain

upon her? You did, Weldon! Heaven forgive you for it, but another day like that might be the end of——"

He paused, caught his breath, and said deliberately, with unspeakable emotion: "Another day like this might be the end of Helen O'Mallock. Do you want *that* on your head?"

And Weldon submitted, though writhing with impatience.

To make the best of that bad day, he lay down on the couch in the library, and the turning of the newspaper, crinkling softly under the touch of the doctor, soothed him to sleep.

When he awakened, he was astonished to find that it was late afternoon. The room was filled with dim, golden light, with a flush of rose in it. Before him stood Aunt Maggie.

"You been needin' just this sleep," she told him kindly. "Ain't you missin' your lunch?"

"Is that for me?" he asked her, pointing to a paper in her hand.

She nodded, and taking the envelope he tore it open and read:

I am in desperate need. Can you help me?
F. L.

Francesca Laguarda!

In desperate need—could he help her?

He slipped the paper into his pocket and stood up.

"Who brought this?" he asked.

"Is it poison?" she asked him, her eyes popping.

"I think it may be," he answered. "Who brought it? Or was it slipped under the door?"

He thought that much more likely, but she answered at once: "A city man, by the look of him. He's sitting down in a right fine automobile, downstairs."

In half a minute, Weldon was down the stairs also, only making sure that both his guns were loaded and in place beneath his armpits. He stepped outdoors at the rear of the house, cautiously, and there he saw beyond the patio gate a powerful looking, green roadster, and in the front seat, lolling with a cigarette, his former acquaintance, Cunningham.

He went out to the man with wonder in his heart. Cunningham, seeing him, reached out a cordial hand.

"Well?" said he, without preliminaries.

"Do you know what was in this letter?" asked Weldon.

"Not a word," answered Cunningham.

There are ways and ways of deceiving, and the best of all is a blunt affection of indifference; but Weldon thought now that he was hearing golden truth indeed.

"Cunningham, if you don't know what's in the letter, how do you happen to have brought it?"

"I had a letter," said Cunningham with perfectly obvious caution. "This note was inclosed and I was asked to deliver it to you."

"You don't often run about the country delivering notes, do you?"

"Look here," said Cunningham, in the tone of one who wishes to be conciliatory but will not be pressed too far, "I want to talk to you as a friend, Weldon. I won't be treated like a sneak thief."

"I don't mean to put it that way," said Weldon, "but I really have to find out who gave you this note for me?"

"A man in whom you'd have no interest. A Mexican, in fact. Confound it, I don't know that I should have told you even this!"

"Cunningham," said Weldon, "I want to believe you, but isn't it a fact that Francesca Laguarda gave you this note?"

Cunningham opened his eyes a little.

"Francesca?"

Then he shut up and sat in his car, saying not a word.

The latter was quick to appreciate the difficulty. He brought the note from his pocket and passed it to the other. "That's what you delivered," he pointed out.

Cunningham read it slowly, aloud, but with his voice hushed.

" 'I am in desperate need. Can you help me?' "

Then he added, lowering the paper and frowning at Weldon: "But why in heaven's name should she send to *you* for help?"

"I wanted to ask you that."

Cunningham bit his lip and flushed.

"I have an idea," said Weldon curiously, "that you'd as soon that she asked you?"

"Nonsense!" scoffed Cunningham. But the cloud remained on his brow. He seemed to be trying to puzzle out a vast problem.

"Will you tell me this," said Weldon. "Is she in trouble? I mean, is she under the control of any person who could——"

"Under the control of the demon!" said Cunningham with bitterness. "Who else *could* control her?" He added: "No, she's all right. She's stronger than ever, so far as I know."

"Then I think you can take back word to her that I'm engaged here."

Cunningham nodded, but he surveyed Weldon with interest.

"You really won't go?" said he.

"Certainly not."

"You're even a rarer sort than I thought," said Cunningham. "Tell me how you manage it? How can you keep away when she asks for you?"

"Because you gave me an excellent warning in the first place," replied Weldon. "Because you told me what a hellcat she is, Cunningham. I've taken her, as one might say, with a grain of salt."

"I told you about her?" said Cunningham, laughing rather bitterly. "Well—I suppose I did!"

That small sentence told Weldon a great deal. The prophet who told of the fire had not been able to save himself from the flames.

"You really are not going?" asked Cunningham.

"I've told you before. As a matter of fact, this is the crudest little trap that I've had sprung beneath my nose!"

"Trap?" cried Cunningham. "Why, man, do you think she'd try to harm you after appealing to you?"

"Do you think she's above that?"

"Man, man," cried Cunningham, like one bewildered, "don't you know her any better than that?"

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

BAGGING A LION IN TEXAS

NOT long ago, Carl Payton, a farmer of Rowlett, Texas, set out on a hunting trip after no more deadly game than the rabbit. Shortly after daybreak, he happened to be near a culvert. Some one called to him, and he turned to see a large lioness jump from cover. Nothing daunted—although it must have been no small surprise to see the jungle beast in that place—Payton opened fire with his pump shotgun. He succeeded in killing the lioness, which proved to be seven feet in length. Together with Joe Burkhart, the farmer who had called out to him in warning, Payton went back to Rowlett and told of his catch.

It seems that the lioness had escaped, the night before, from the train which was carrying her from the Dallas Municipal Zoo to Independence, Missouri. Evading her keepers, she had escaped from her cage, jumped from the car between Dallas and Greenville, and wandered around until discovered by Payton and Burkhart.

At the Pit's Edge

by Johnston McCulley

Author of "Baby Beef," etc.

OUT of the mysterious depths of the burning desert country came Old Zed Parlen. He left his ancient burro and his scanty camp gear in a gulch at the edge of the town of Mustang and went on into the town alone.

"You jus' browse around here until I come back, Jasper," Zed told his four-legged companion of countless desert prospecting trips. "You jus' stick around, Jasper, and get what's comin' to you. I always said that I'd do the right thing by you if we struck it rich, and I sure and certain aims to keep my word, Jasper. Oats! That's what you've got comin' for long and faithful service—oats!"

Zed Parlen was tired because of his long tramp across the dreary waste land beneath the merciless sun. He had hurried to reach the town of Mustang by sunset, and had just about made it. Night was falling now. In the ramshackle, unpainted buildings of the town the kerosene lamps had been lighted. Men were gathering in the resorts to drink and gamble and seek what recreation they could find.

Mustang was at the edge of the desert, with the cow country on one side and the mining district on the other. It was a wild town at times, yet no worse than some of its neighbors. Zed Parlen had been there before, but possibly few of the men in town now would remember him.

Despite his fatigue, he walked with firm and measured tread, like a man with some high purpose. There was a look of determination in his leather-colored, weather-stained, wrinkled face. His eyes gleamed. His arms seemed to be half rigid at his sides, and his fists opened and closed repeatedly.

But when he came to the end of Mustang's one, narrow, crooked street, where the lights began and men could see him, all this changed. Zed Parlen

suddenly became old and tired. He stumbled along as though on the verge of exhaustion. His countenance became that of a man at the limit of his endurance.

He got upon the warped plank sidewalk and staggered along it, paying not the slightest attention to those he passed, against whom he brushed. He did not glance into the business establishments. He went directly toward the Four Flush, the largest building in the town.

The Four Flush, saloon and gambling hall, was the social center of Mustang, the clearing house for rumors and gossip. Zed Parlen expected to find there the man he wished to see. He passed through the open door and stopped for a moment, to lean against the wall and blink his eyes at the bright lights.

He was a perfect picture of a tired, broken, dejected man. His eyes roamed over the interior of the Four Flush, viewing the men at the bar and at the gambling tables, those who gathered in groups for conversation, and those who wandered around. Then Zed Parlen continued his journey, stumbling and staggering to the head of the bar, finally to clutch at the rail as though in a desperate effort to keep his feet.

A bartender approached him instantly. "Howdy!" he said, with an eye to business.

Zed Parlen nodded his head to acknowledge the salutation, and waved a hand weakly to indicate that he wished a drink. His appearance was that of a man who needed one badly. The bartender eyed him suspiciously, for Zed's appearance was also that of a man who probably could not pay. Yet you never could tell in this country, where a ragged man might own a claim worth half a million. The bartender decided to take a chance; he put out bottle and glass.

"You just get in, old-timer?" he asked.

Zed Parlen gulped his drink, blinked his eyes rapidly, gave a gasp, and nodded in the affirmative. He poured himself a second drink and tossed it off.

"I—I was jus' about done," Zed said.

"It sure beats me how you desert rats mess around out there in the sun with the rocks and rattlesnakes until you ain't got any grub left, and then stagger into town to take a brace and try it again," said the bartender. "That game is sure too tough for me. Nothin' to it!"

"Sometimes there ain't, and sometimes ag'in there is," Zed Parlen informed him. "There's always a chance. Some gents have struck it rich, haven't they?"

"Yeah! About one gent in fifty thousand," the bartender admitted. "The percentage against a man is too big, hombre. How you feel now?"

"I'm feelin' a lot better," Zed replied. "I sure needed them drinks. I don't drink much—only when I need it. Soon as I get me some ham and eggs under my belt, I'll be all right."

"Yeah? You got the money to pay for 'em?" the bartender wanted to know. "And for them two drinks?"

"Why, certain!" Zed Parlen told him, with some heat in his voice and manner. "Did you have a notion that I was bummin' them drinks?"

"It's been done before now, old-timer."

"But not by me!" Zed protested. "Not ever! I pay my debts, I do—all kinds."

He fumbled in his ragged clothes and brought forth a well-filled poke.

"I ain't got any reg'lar money with me," Zed said, "but I reckon you c'n take it out o' this."

The bartender accepted the poke and immediately opened it. His eyes bulged

at what he saw. He licked his lips. His nostrils quivered. And he glanced furtively along the bar, toward the spot where "Handsome Jack" Dovaine was standing.

"I've got to buy me some grub supplies and some oats that I promised my burro," Old Zed continued. "I wonder if you could give me some real money for a couple o' pinches o' this here gold dust, to make it handier?"

"I'll call Mr. Dovaine. He's the boss," the bartender explained.

The bartender had been wondering how to work Handsome Jack in on this affair, and here was his chance. He caught Dovaine's eye and beckoned. Handsome Jack was beside Old Zed instantly.

The bartender explained, winked, and Dovaine's eyes glowed. He took Zed by the arm.

"You come right into my office, old-timer," Dovaine said. "We can fix you up, all right."

Zed Parlen followed Handsome Jack the length of the big room and into a tiny one that Dovaine called his office. Dovaine closed and locked the door. His eyes were gleaming as he faced Zed again.

"Let's see that stuff," Dovaine said. "It's rich!"

"I reckon!" Zed acknowledged.

"Looks like you'd just swept it up off the ground."

"Almost that easy," Zed admitted.

"Come off some claim?"

"Nope! Not any old claim, that is. I ain't recorded yet."

"Where did you get it?"

"That'd be tellin'," Zed informed him, grinning a bit. "Do you mind if I sit down? I'm dead tired."

"Sit down there and make yourself at home," Dovaine said. "You want money for some of this? All right! Wait till I get the scales."

Dovaine disappeared through another little door that let him in behind the bar. The bartender was waiting for him there.

"That old coot just came in from the outside, boss," the bartender reported. "I spotted him as he came through the door. He was just about all in."

"Anybody else see him?"

"They might have seen him, but nobody gave him any special attention. Took him for an ordinary desert rat, I reckon."

"All right! Give me a bottle and a couple of glasses. I'll remember you if anything comes of this."

Dovaine got the gold scales, too. His face was inscrutable now, a gambler's face. Handsome Jack Dovaine, the dude of the district, professional card shark, swindler and cheat, owner of the Four Flush, had acquired a large amount of his wealth from helpless and ignorant old prospectors.

Dovaine loathed and feared the desert, but he loved the profits that came from it. Like some foul bird of prey he perched here at the desert's edge, waiting for victims. He plied them with liquor, caught them off guard, used marked cards, got papers signed in nefarious ways, resorted to violence when it was necessary, aided by others of his ilk, such as this bartender.

Taking the bottle, glasses, and scales, Dovaine went back into the little office. He poured drinks.

"Thanks, mister, but I just had me a couple," Old Zed objected.

"Drink to your good luck, man!"

"Not just now, I reckon. I aim to get me some ham and eggs first o' all. I been out almost three months this time, and I crave some food that I ain't cooked myself."

"Make your strike in a new district?" Dovaine asked.

"I got to be mighty careful about talkin'," Zed declared. "I been prospectin' almost all my life, always hopin' that I'd hit it rich some day. And now

I have. I've seen others lose out, mister. Some of 'em talked too much and got their claims jumped. And some got swindled."

"I don't blame you at all for being careful," Dovaine told him. "But you've got to make a move some time. You'll have to record your claim."

"Yeah? Maybe I won't even record it," Zed said. Then he bent forward across the table and grew confidential. "I got something pretty good," he went on to say. "It ain't just a pocket, either. I reckon it to be an old water-course. The bed o' it is rotten with gold—free gold! It's the dream o' every prospector who ever swung a hammer or pick!"

Handsome Jack Dovaine drew in his breath sharply. "Sounds good!" he said. "But maybe, old-timer, you're just a bit too much enthusiastic. Those good things aren't always reliable—they peter out sometimes."

"Yeah? Let me tell you somethin', Mr. Dovaine it ain't petered out yet, and I ain't only scratched it. You see this here poke, Mr. Dovaine? I've already got more'n a hundred times what's in that poke cached away out there in the desert. And I'm tellin' you that I ain't scratched it."

"Then you're a millionaire," Dovaine said.

"I reckon!" Zed agreed. "And I'm a mite worried about it, too. I got the stuff, but I don't know what to do with it. I wish that I had a partner."

"No partner?"

"I had one once, a long time ago, but he shuffled off," Zed replied. "It's this way: I'm an old man, and I don't want to be swindled out o' the gold that I've spent a lifetime lookin' for. I want to get it somewhere so it'll be safe, turn it into money and get it into a bank. I've got a fortune already, and there's a score more fortunes out there. Plenty for a dozen men—so I wish that I had a partner."

"Possibly I can help you," Dovaine suggested. "I'm a business man——"

"Yeah!" Zed interrupted. "Maybe I c'n make a deal with you. There's a fortune waitin' for you out there if you'll help me with mine that I've collected already. You probably know how to go about it."

"What do you suggest?" Dovaine asked. At this juncture he wanted Zed to do all the suggesting.

"I'll take you out there with me and show it to you," Zed explained. "You help me get my gold out safe, and you can get out all you want for yourself. If you say so, we c'n stake claims, and you help me protect 'em."

"That's agreeable," Dovaine said, fighting himself to keep an expression of gloating out of his face. "I'll send some trusted man out with you——"

"No, sir!" Parlen said promptly. "My partner can go along, but not any other man. And if anybody tries to follow, I'll use my six-gun fast and often. Nobody is goin' to know where this strike is until I've got my share safe!"

"I hate the desert!" Dovaine declared. "I don't know anything about it."

"You wouldn't hate it if you understood it," Zed told him. "The desert is a mighty fine place, Mr. Dovaine—a clean place. She tries out men, I reckon, and then renders her verdict. If a man's all right, and gets to love the desert, she does somethin' handsome by him. If he ain't all right—well, there's snakes and buzzards, and hot sands with no water——"

Dovaine shuddered. He loathed the desert, hated it, feared it. But he loved gold, especially when it came easy. A plan already was forming in his mind, and, because it was the mind of Handsome Jack Dovaine, the plan was an unworthy one. He would make the trip with Old Zed Parlen. After Zed had betrayed the place of gold, a

sudden treacherous shot or a blow on the head would do for the old man. Dovaine could make up some story, if men questioned.

"Can't we take another man along?" Dovaine asked. "He could do some of the work."

"No, sir! Just the two o' us," Zed declared. "I don't aim to run any chances o' losin'. We c'n do all the work that needs to be done."

"I'll go you, Parlen!" Dovaine said, after more talk.

"Now that's fine, Mr. Dovaine. We'll start a little before dawn."

"But you are tired."

"Shucks! I won't be tired by then. I'll get me a good sleep to-night," Zed replied. "You meet me an hour before dawn, at the mouth o' the gulch south o' town."

"Horses? Any outfit?"

"Just fetch along a good pack burro, Mr. Dovaine. I'll have the grub and everything. You can bring back a load o' gold, maybe, on your burro."

"Wouldn't horses be faster?"

"Yeah; as long as they lasted. But we'd have to carry feed and water for 'em, and we can't do that this trip. We ain't goin' to follow regular trails, understand."

Handsome Jack Dovaine considered that last statement for a moment, and once more fear assailed him.

"I'm not used to desert travel," he explained. "If we go far from the main trails—why, what would become of me if anything happened to you?"

"There ain't anything goin' to happen to me," Zed told him. "And you want to be mighty careful, Mr. Dovaine, about talkin'. If you tell what's up, we may have a stampede on our hands—and the ground ain't protected."

"Don't worry about me talking."

"If you don't want to go, Mr. Dovaine, I can get somebody else, I reckon."

"I'll go! Consider it settled. I'll be there an hour or so before dawn."

"That'll be fine," Parlen told him. "You just leave everything to me, sir. I know the desert country and all its tricks. You dress comfortable and bring a burro—that's all."

Zed Parlen got money for his dust and left the Four Flush. One of Handsome Jack's men trailed him, under orders. The old prospector went to Mustang's best restaurant and ate a hearty meal. Then he journeyed to the general store and purchased food supplies, such as any prospector would be expected to buy. He also got a quantity of ammunition for the old six-shooter that swung against his hip.

Packing his supplies, Old Zed went to the livery stable and negotiated for oats. He carried these along with him as he made his way slowly down the street and out of the town, and into the dense darkness of a moonless night.

A few hundred yards from the end of the street, Zed stopped at one side of the trail in the darkness and put down his packs. He extracted his six-gun from its holster and stood ready. There was silence for a moment, and then the soft thudding of boots in the yellow dust and sand.

Zed stepped smartly from his hiding place and shoved the muzzle of his weapon against the ribs of a man who had been creeping along furtively in the darkness.

"Put 'em up, hombre, and be right smart about it," Old Zed said. "You ain't clever at all, you horned toad. You followed me from the Four Flush and watched while I ate my ham and eggs, and then you followed me to the store and the stable, and then out here. You got a passion to be buried right here, feller?"

"What right you got to stick me up?" a voice demanded. "You don't own this trail, do you?"

"I reckon not. But I'm bossin' it

right this minute," Zed told him. "You turn around and make tracks, hombre! And you'd better not try to follow me ag'in, either. I'm right down nervous to-night, and when I get nervous I'm liable to shoot at any little sound. Any little sound at all, feller! Turn around and git goin', pronto!"

The man in the darkness muttered something that sounded like an oath. He turned around, too, but as he did so Parlen got his gun.

"If you crave to see this six-gun o' yours ag'in, you c'n find it along here somewhere in the mornin'," Zed told him.

His keen ears told him that the other marched back toward the town. Zed picked up his things and went a few hundred feet farther, then turned down into the gulch, where the burro was waiting.

"I done got oats for you, Jasper, but you can't eat 'em here and now," Zed told the animal. "We ain't campin' here for the night, Jasper, 'cause we might be bothered if we did. And we want a good night's rest, dang it!"

A few minutes later, Zed guided the burro out of the gulch and toward the right, across some broken country where the going had to be slow and cautious. They came to another gulch, and Zed continued along this until they reached a little stream that fought for life at the edge of a thirsty land.

There, Zed made camp for the night. He did not build a fire, however. He allowed the burro to drink, and gave him the oats. He fixed his blankets, picketed the animal because he would want him in the morning without wasting time to round him up if he had wandered, and then rolled up in his blankets and faced the stars. A few minutes later, he was asleep.

Zed was awake half an hour before the false dawn came. He made a little fire and cooked some breakfast, cleansed his utensils and dishes in clean sand, and packed. Jasper followed him back across the rough ground to the other gulch, and there they waited beside a Joshua tree.

Handsome Jack Dovaine appeared at the appointed hour, with a burro. They started out toward the rising sun, following the weary, dusty trail.

"You never find gold at the end o' an easy road, Mr. Dovaine," Old Zed explained.

Handsome Jack certainly did not find it easy. Inside an hour they left the main trail, followed the bottom of an ancient dry watercourse for almost a mile, and emerged behind a ledge of rock in country where they could not be seen from the distant road.

They circled a butte, walking over rough ground, dodging clumps of brush, passing through fields of boulders and sharp rocks where the inexperienced stumbled and stubbed his toes. Handsome Jack Dovaine was inexperienced.

They made their nooning at the bottom of a gentle slope over which they had wound their way. The blazing sun poured its merciless rays down upon them. Dovaine sweltered. Zed Parlen talked of everything, yet not much of anything.

They ate and drank a little water, and Zed grinned at the other man.

"You don't drink much water out here if you are wise," he pointed out. "Just rinse your mouth, Mr. Dovaine, or hold pebbles in it. You better do as I tell you about things, for I don't want you to get sick. A sick partner ain't much good."

"My feet are raw," Dovaine said.

"Shucks! We ain't started yet. Come night, you can bathe your feet and rub soap over 'em. You'll be toughened up a lot before we get to the end o' the trip."

"I never asked you how long it would take."

"We'll make it in four days, if we keep travelin'," Zed replied. "Just keepin' at it does the trick. Plod and plod—that's the way. Speed in the desert don't work. Any desert man c'n tell you that."

"Let's get on," Dovaine suggested. The lure of gold already was strong within him.

"Yeah!" Zed agreed. "But, before we do, I'm goin' back to the top o' this here slope. And if there's anybody followin', I'm goin' to have some target practice."

Dovaine fought to keep from betraying sudden alarm. He had ordered one of his trusted men to follow, a desert man who was an excellent trailer. He got up and staggered after Zed to the crest of the slope.

Zed stretched out behind a rock, removed his hat, and peered over the crest. He was motionless for a moment; then he grunted and slipped back. Leaving Dovaine there, Zed hurried back to Jasper and got a rifle out of his pack. He slipped a cartridge into the chamber and went back to the crest again.

A shot cracked.

"That made him hunt for cover!" Zed said.

"You shot at a man?" Dovaine asked.

"I reckon! And I'll shoot at every other man as tries to follow me to my strike. Somebody in Mustang must have seen me with that poke, I reckon. A man tried to follow me last night, but he didn't follow me far."

Dovaine looked at him suspiciously, but Zed's face was inscrutable and innocent-looking. They got the burros and went on. Three times during that day Zed investigated the back trail, but he did not catch sight of pursuit.

They camped that night in a dry desert camp, and Zed prepared the meal and doctored Dovaine's feet. Handsome Jack limped the next day, yet they made fair progress. And the second night they camped in the midst of a wild waste of hills where everything was desolate. Dovaine seemed to shiver as he watched Zed fussing around the fire.

Three times that day a rattler had warned. Lizards had been scampering over the hot rocks. The specter of thirst was before the eyes of Handsome Jack. Buzzards wheeled the sky, suggestive of sinister things.

Dovaine's nerves were on edge, but he fought to control himself. The thought of the gold lured him on. He could endure some of this if there was a fortune at the end, he told himself. And he nursed a resentment against Old Zed Parlen because he seemed so at home in the desert.

They watched a blazing scarlet sunset.

"Ain't that pretty?" Zed asked. "There ain't anything like that any place else, Mr. Dovaine. I love the old desert, you betcha."

"I'm sorry that you haven't a partner who can join in your enthusiasm," Dovaine said.

"I had a partner once, and he loved the desert, too."

"And did the desert bring him good luck?"

"Yeah, in a way. He located a find, all right. I didn't happen to be with him then. I was away visitin' seein' some o' my folks. He wrote me about it and told me to hurry back."

"Well, what happened, if the strike was a good one and you were his partner?"

"His name was Jim Ludder. Maybe you knew him."

"Seems to me that I remember the name," Dovaine said.

"He died in Mustang."

"Oh, yes! I wonder if he wasn't the old man who came in with news of a strike?"

"Yeah! And some o' the jaspers in

Mustang tried to find out where it was. He had a poke with him that opened their eyes, Jim Ludder did. They gave him liquor, and he never could resist that. But he wouldn't tell 'em, accordin' to the story I heard."

"I remember now," Dovaine said. "I saw some of the stuff. It was rich."

"Yeah! Free gold," Zed agreed. "Tons o' it, he wrote me. But he never got to enjoy any o' it."

"Too bad that he had to die."

"Yeah!" Parlen said. "Poor old Jim! I heard tell that they got him in a cabin and tortured him to make him tell. But he wouldn't. And his heart was old and worn-out, and he died while they was torturin' him."

"That tale is a bit fanciful," Dovaine observed, looking at Old Zed closely. "An old heart—too much liquor—the excitement of making a rich strike and——"

"Uh-huh!" Zed said.

"Too bad, too. If I remember rightly, the stuff was awful rich. He never told where he made the strike. So all that gold is out in the desert somewhere, waiting to be found again."

Zed grinned, then laughed lightly. "Not much it ain't, Mr. Dovaine," he said. "Didn't I tell you that Jim wrote to me after he made the strike?"

"You—you mean——" Dovaine gasped.

"I reckon! I went out and located the strike, Mr. Dovaine. That's where the gold in my poke came from. Jim had piled up some, and I piled up more. It's Jim's lost mine we goin' to now."

Handsome Jack Dovaine breathed quickly. He always had wanted to find the scene of that rich strike. And here was this old desert rat leading him to it!

He did not like that talk about Jim Ludder, but Zed Parlen seemed innocent enough about it. He didn't rave about the manner of his old partner's passing. Perhaps, Dovaine thought, Old Zed was a bit glad that Jim Ludder was gone, that he had a greater interest in the find than he would have had if Ludder had lived.

The dawn came, and again they went forward with the burros through the rosy morning, then through the blistering heat of the day. And now the torture of Handsome Jack Dovaine began.

Zed pointed out serpents and pests. He told grim stories as he indicated buzzards that wheeled the sky. He told tales of thirst, than which there is no greater tragedy.

"You never find gold at the end o' an easy road," he said. "Always remember that, Mr. Dovaine."

"This certainly isn't an easy one," Dovaine replied.

"Just think o' it! If a man fusses around this kind o' country for years, ain't he entitled to what he finds? Wouldn't you want to shoot a man who'd rob him o' it?"

"He is surely entitled to all he gets!" Dovaine said.

"A desert always rewards," Old Zed declared. "It rewards both good and evil. It is tryin' you out right now, Mr. Dovaine, and you've stood it well so far. It ain't ready to give its verdict on you yet, I reckon."

Handsome Jack shivered again. He was afraid—afraid of things that crawled, and struck, and stung, afraid of grotesque vegetation horrible alike in sunshine and moonlight to him. The shifting sand seemed to hiss at him, to pull at his boots. He was afraid of the blazing sun, the heat, the idea of thirst, of being utterly lost in all this dreary waste. He fought to keep from looking at the sky where buzzards wheeled.

But he remembered the gold, the thing he craved. He asked Zed Parlen hundreds of questions about it as they marched along. A dry watercourse, ancient, its bottom rotten with gold, dust, and nuggets! Fortunes there

waiting to be scooped up and sacked and carried back to a civilization that lived for and on gold! Zed laughed.

"It's a great game, Mr. Dovaine," he said. "It don't do a man any good to have billions, can't spend only so much. It's just a game. Gold ain't nothin' but a broken stone, anyway. I'll show you gold, Mr. Dovaine."

"Don't be a fool!" Dovaine snapped. "A man can do anything with gold. He can buy luxuries, pleasures—buy men and woman if he wants to! And don't tell me that old gag about gold not being able to buy happiness! It'll buy all the happiness I want and need!"

"Then you want to make a hit with the desert, Mr. Dovaine," Zed told him. "Learn to love the clean desert and she'll reward you. But a man's got to be clean to be the desert's sweetheart."

"Yes?" Dovaine said, and laughed. "Clean? Snakes, and lizards, and buzzards! Filthy things that crawl!"

Some lizards are right down pretty," Zed objected. "And snakes——"

"I can't stand them!" Dovaine said.

"I've studied 'em," Zed told him. "Snakes know a lot, you betcha! They c'n try a man out the same as the desert can, and render a verdict!"

Dovaine decided that Parlen was like so many other desert rats—his brain touched by the sun. All rats of the desert talked foolishly at times. They fancied peculiar things.

And Dovaine wanted to think and talk about the gold, and nothing else. The desert was a nightmare through which he had to pass to get to the beautiful dream.

"When will we get there?" he asked.

"To-morrow," Zed said, as they prepared to roll in for the night. "Long about the middle o' the day, I reckon. There's a little spring o' fresh, sweet water near the strike. That's what attracted Jim Ludder and caused him to find it, I reckon."

So they would be there to-morrow! Handsome Jack Dovaine had changed his plans somewhat. No longer did he think of slaying Zed Parlen, because he feared the return across the desert alone. The wind would shift sand over the faint trail they had made. And Jack Dovaine did not know his way about. He dared not try it. He remembered the buzzards that wheeled the sky, waiting for just such things.

He decided that he would be on his good behavior with Zed Parlen and gain his confidence. They would load up the burros with all the gold they could carry and take it to Mustang. He would swear Zed to silence, saying that they must protect their find. He would propose another expedition, with ample supplies, and with more men. Dovaine would pick the men. Zed Parlen would die along the way. Jim Ludder had died. And Handsome Jack would fix it—being adept at fixing papers—so that he would inherit what Zed had taken out already, as a surviving partner.

Dovaine felt miserable the following morning. He had about reached the limit of his endurance. Only the thought of gold kept him on his feet—that and the fear of being left for the buzzards.

And Zed, now that he was nearing the end of the journey, was singing some wild song of the desert in nasal tones that grated on Dovaine's nerves. Dovaine wished to hurry, but Zed maintained the usual pace. Once more the blazing sun blistered them. Heat waves danced across the parched land. It seemed to Dovaine that his tongue was swollen so that it filled his mouth completely.

Rattlers sounded their warnings now and then. Lizards scampered from beneath their feet. Zed called attention to them constantly, praised them, spoke to them, until Dovaine felt sure that the old prospector was mad.

They came to the crest of a rocky slope and stopped.

"We're within a mile o' her now, Mr. Dovaine," Zed said. "A fortune, and a big one, within a mile, and all you have to do is pick it up! A dozen fortunes, maybe twenty! That old watercourse may be rotten with gold for miles."

"Let's get on!" Dovaine cried.

"Don't do to get in a hurry in this country," Zed warned. "The buzzards are always watchin'. They c'n smell an accident a day before it happens, some say. You've got to play your game with the desert, and a part o' it is to be careful. The desert's testin' you right now, Mr. Dovaine. She'll give you a fortune—if you're worthy."

"What do you mean by that, Parlen? Don't you think I'm worthy?"

"Shucks! It ain't for me to say. It's for the desert to pass a verdict on a man. We'll go on, Mr. Dovaine."

It seemed to Handsome Jack that it took an age to make that mile down the rocky slope. But after a time they turned into a dry gulch and followed it for some distance, where the going was comparatively easy.

"Look at old Jasper," Zed said. "He knows that he's gettin' near the strike. Jasper ain't interested in gold any, but he sure and certain is interested in water. When I get my fortune to town, I'm goin' to arrange for Jasper to have hand-picked oats and hay all the rest o' his life. I always take care o' my friends—and my enemies!"

They turned into a bigger depression in the earth. A short distance ahead, Handsome Jack Dovaine saw what he knew was a camp. Jasper made for it, and Dovaine's burro followed him, his long ears bobbing.

"Well, here we are!" Zed Parlen declared. "We'll get the packs off and let the burros do as they like. Then I'll show you some o' my gold, and show you where there's plenty more."

Dovaine was excited and nervous. He jumped a foot when Zed's gun cracked.

"Only a snake," Zed said. "Hate to kill him, but I reckon he didn't understand about us. He was a stranger snake what's come around here since I've been gone."

Dovaine sat down weakly on a rock, after making sure that there were no more snakes near it. He was trembling, and Zed laughed at him. He was enjoying the gambler's confusion.

"Remember that the desert's testin' you," he warned. "Don't let her see that you're afraid o' a rattler."

"Stop talking like that!" Dovaine commanded.

"You're gettin' peevish," Zed complained. "That's because you ain't used to it."

"I'd never get used to it," said Dovaine. "One trip out here is enough for me. I can hire men to get out the gold."

"You stay right there and rest, Mr. Dovaine, while I fix the camp," Zed told him.

From beneath a ledge, Zed brought forth an old tent, which he pitched. He unearthed grub, too, and carried water, and put things to rights. Dovaine watched him as though in a trance. He glanced around at the country and shivered.

He felt that he wanted to scream. Save for the hissing sand, there was silence, an oppressive silence that seemed to descend like a blanket. The heat waves danced blackly in regiments across the rocks and sand. There seemed to be no natural life, save that which was offensive to him.

"Never was prettier flowers than you find in the desert," Zed told him. "And look at the colors in them rocks! The desert's the place—for its friends! Look at that buzzard wheelin'! I wonder why it's wheelin' around here. Men say as how a buzzard knows!"

"Stop that kind of talk!" Dovaine shouted. "You'll drive me mad!"

"I sure and certain beg your pardon, Mr. Dovaine. Come and look at the gold and maybe you'll feel better."

Dovaine got up and staggered after Parlen down into the bed of the old watercourse, where the deposit had been made ages before. Zed had told the truth about the strike. The gold was there. Even a novice like Dovaine realized that fact in ten minutes.

"Take it easy," Zed warned. "Don't let the sight o' some gold get you all fussed up, Mr. Dovaine. Shucks! That ain't anything. Let me show you some that I got cached."

Dovaine followed him up to the camp again, and they went along a ledge of rock until they came to a series of tiny caves. A long, repulsive body glided almost from beneath their feet, and Dovaine cried out.

"That's your nerves," Zed informed him. "Shucks! That's my old friend. Pedro, that there snake is! I call him Pedro because he reminds me o' a Mexican I knew once—looks like him in the face. Pedro's a pet."

"Don't talk about snakes!" Dovaine begged.

"Snakes are desert folk, and you want to learn to get along with 'em," said Zed. "You'll make the desert angry if you don't, and remember that the desert is testin' you and gettin' ready to render her verdict."

"Talk sense! Let's see the gold!"

Zed stopped in front of one of the tiny caves and brushed away sand and dust with the toe of his boot. He reached in, drew out a poke, and opened it. Handsome Jack feasted his eyes.

"I judge that I've got more'n a hundred thousand dollars' worth cached in there," Zed said.

"You left it here—like this?"

"Why not? The desert would guard it, I knew. And there ain't a lot o' folks wanders around here. Maybe no white man was ever here, except me—and Jim Ludder—and you, Mr. Dovaine."

"We must get this stuff back to Mustang," Dovaine said. "And we must get more—much more! Man! we can own the world!"

"If it's the verdict o' the desert," Zed said.

"Nonsense! You're crazy about that stuff! Can we eat now? I feel hungry—weak."

"Sight o' gold makes lots o' men feel that way," Zed said. "Dog-gone!"

"What's the trouble now?" Dovaine asked.

"I been watchin' that buzzard, and I don't like his actions. He sure and certain acts like he knowed there was goin' to be a square meal for him around here. I hope that it won't be Jasper. I don't want anything to happen to that burro."

"Don't talk about buzzards," Dovaine said. "Let's get back to camp. I need a drink. That gold——"

"The sight o' a lot o' gold works funny on some men," Zed explained. "But they get over it in a few minutes. Now you might take a notion, Mr. Dovaine, while you're crazed about that there gold, to bump me off and have it all for yourself."

"Nonsense! I——"

"It's a temptation," Zed admitted. "But you'd never live to reach Mustang if you did. You don't know the desert—she ain't passed a verdict on you yet. But maybe I'd better take your gun, Mr. Dovaine, until you get over the fever."

"I—you needn't worry!"

"I don't intend to worry," said Zed. His hand darted forward and got Dovaine's gun. "Just to be on the safe side," he said. "I reckon that you can't blame me much for bein' careful. I don't want anybody to shoot me in a fit o' madness."

"That's all right with me," Dovaine said, trying to smile. "But you've nothing to worry about, Parlen."

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Dovaine! That buzzard knows his business, and he's been hangin' around us. Maybe he thought you would go mad and shuffle me off—like you did Jim Ludder!"

"What's that?" Dovaine cried.

"Like you did my old partner, Jim Ludder!" Parlen snapped at him. "I know what happened, Dovaine! One o' your hirelin's talked. You tortured poor old Jim to make him talk and tell you where to find this gold. He died while you was doin' it!"

"You're crazy man!" Dovaine cried.

"I'm not crazy! I know the truth! I went into Mustang with that poke to get you, Dovaine! I always pay my debts, personal and otherwise—and I pay my old partner's, too! You killed him, Dovaine, just when he was fixed to get some enjoyment out o' life, after searchin' years and years for it. And you've got to pay!"

"You—you——" Dovaine shouted. Guilt was in his face, confession in his manner.

"I lured you out here," Zed said. "I'm goin' to let the desert decide about you. You'll get the verdict o' the desert."

"You'll kill me!" Dovaine cried in an agony of terror.

"You killed my partner, tortured him. You sent a man to follow me that night in Mustang, and I mighty quick sent him back. You had a man follow us when we started, and I dodged him. You wasn't goin' to play fair with me even after I offered to bring you here and let you get a fortune. You intended to have what I'd already gathered, too!"

"Don't! Don't!" Dovaine cried abjectly. "I—I've got money! I'll make it right with you!"

Zed Parlen laughed. "Money?" he cried. "I've got a fortune right here, more money than you'd ever have! My partner found it and generously left it for me. And it lured you here for vengeance."

Old Zed Parlen's eyes were flashing now. He slipped Dovaine's gun into his belt and drew his own. He watched his man closely.

"Maybe that buzzard knows," Zed said. "It won't be long before the desert decides whether to be your friend or not. Now, you march!"

"I—I'll do anything——" Dovaine began.

"Then march, like I told you! That way, Dovaine!"

He piloted Handsome Jack along the rim of the dry watercourse, the storehouse of dust and nuggets, beneath the burning sun. The sand hissed as they passed. Lizards scampered, and the buzzard wheeled in the sky.

"Where—are we going——"

"Just march!" Zed said.

A quarter of a mile they marched, terror claiming Dovaine at every step, Zed guarding against a sudden hostile move. After a time they stopped where a ledge of rock ran down toward the watercourse.

Zed Parlen suddenly gave his prisoner a quick shove. Handsome Jack Dovaine's shrill cry rang out. He was falling as though the earth suddenly had opened beneath his feet.

Then he ended the fall with a crash. He was in a sort of natural pit in the solid rock, at a pit about ten feet square and ten feet deep. He staggered to his feet and looked up, to see Zed's somber face, to see a patch of cloudless, blue sky across which a buzzard wheeled.

"You just rest there a minute," said Zed.

His head disappeared, and Dovaine heard his boots crunch the gravel as he hurried away. The gambler tried desperately to climb out of the natural

pit, but he could not. There were no handholds, no footholds. He tried to jump and reach the edge at the top, but failed by feet.

Then Zed Parlen came back and peered over the edge of the pit again.

"Dovaine, you killed my partner," he said. "That's my verdict, and maybe it'll be the desert's, too."

"Get me out of here!" Dovaine cried.

"You didn't show Jim Ludder any mercy."

"You're going to murder me!"

"I ain't! It ain't in my hands, Dovaine! Maybe you won't know it, but I'm givin' you a chance, more than you gave Jim."

"What are you going to do?"

"You're afraid o' the desert and desert critters, ain't you, Dovaine? I could shoot you, but that'd be too quick. I want to see you suffer, Dovaine, whether you die or not."

"They'll get you for this!"

"I ain't a mite afraid o' that, either. A lot o' things can happen in the desert. Nobody knows I had a reason to kill you. In the desert a man can get delirious, and wander away, and be found dead. Or a snake can get him or——"

He ceased speaking, and his head disappeared again. But it was back almost immediately. Zed Parlen's arms came into view also. He tossed something into the pit.

Dovaine recoiled with a scream of fear, tried to claw his way up the rocky side of the pit. That writhing thing on the rock floor twisted, and squirmed, and hissed, and started to coil. Beady eyes regarded him. Dovaine looked wildly upward—and saw the buzzard wheeling in the sky.

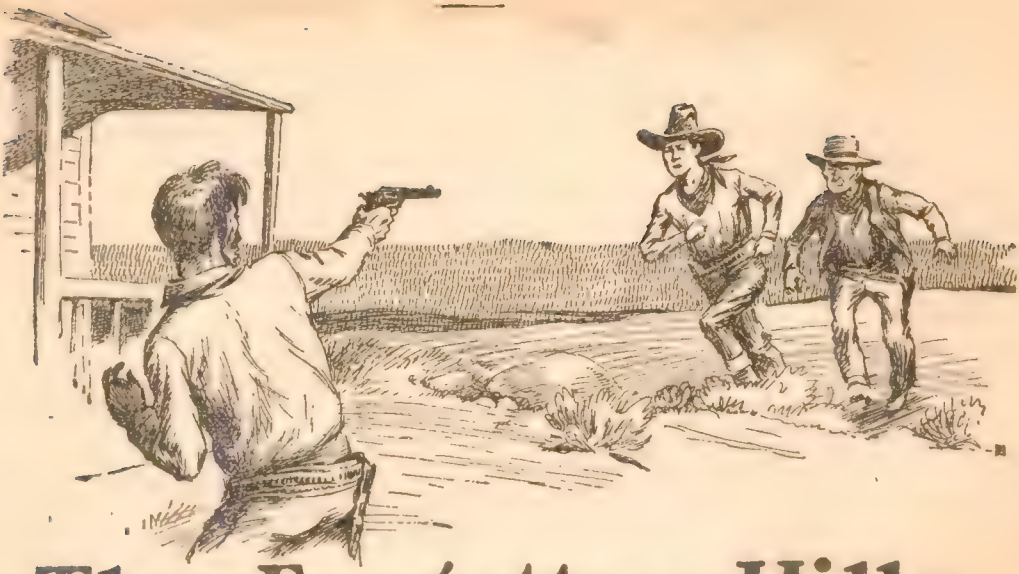
"Help!" he shouted. "Save me, Parlen! I'll do anything you say! Don't let this—this——"

Zed Parlen laughed as he looked over the pit's edge. The rattlesnake squirmed and twisted again, writhed with anger, hissed. It coiled. Came the serpent's warning rattle.

Handsome Jack Dovaine cried out once more, clawed frantically at the rock. His eyes bulged. Spume appeared at the corners of his mouth. He fought for breath. He lurched to one side, tried to get away from the horror.

"The desert's verdict," Zed Parlen said later. He had been down into the pit, and now was out again. He dropped a snake on the ground and watched it wriggle away.

"I reckon it was just the natural fear o' a guilty man that killed him. That pet snake o' mine, what ain't got any fangs——"



The Forgotten Hills

By Robert J. Horton

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

ROGER HARTLAND, Eastern millionaire, visits Silver City, where he owns the Yellowjacket, and finds himself drawn into the life there. His coming antagonizes Mann and Gordon, business men; "Butch" Allen, their gunman, and other followers. Among his friends are Margaret Cram and her father; "Creeps" Hallow, a local character, and the Yellowjacket men.

The town is on the verge of a boom, owing to Hartland's interest in the mine, and good citizens and bad are busy with various schemes for taking advantage of it.

A visit from Rose Raymond, acquaintance of his pleasure-loving days in the East, annoys Roger and threatens his friendship with Margaret. Creeps Hallow, Margaret's watchdog, takes Rose prisoner and holds her in a mountain cave. When rescuers come, Rose, though unharmed, in a fit of rage and terror pushes Creeps over the precipice.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MARGARET LEARNS.

ROGER HARTLAND and Rose Raymond stood alone on the flat shelf of rock that jutted out over the boulders and steep trail above the shale slope. No sound came to them from below save the soft plaint of the winds in the flowing stands of pine.

Rose Raymond's face was as white as the dazzling moonlight. She had nearly gone over with Creeps Hallow, so vicious had been her plunge. Now she stood, breathing in short gasps, her hands on her breast, looking at Hartland with an awed, terrified light in her wide eyes. She had killed Hallow when there was no need for it. She saw the accusation and contempt in Hartland's steady gaze, and it shamed her. There was a weight about her heart. If he would only speak, swear at her, abuse her—*any*thing!

But Hartland did not speak. He untied the rope from under his arms, pulled sharply three times by its end. He heard John Cram's voice from above.

"Are you all right, Hartland?"

"All right," Hartland called.

"Keep an eye out," came the answer. "I'm coming down."

Cram had heard Hartland's command to Creeps Hallow; had heard the wild cry of the doomed man as he fell into

space. He had felt the loosening of the rope as Hartland had landed. Then he had jerked the rope from "Monocle" Joe's hands and secured its end to the horn of his saddle. As luck had it, he had ridden the one horse he owned broken to work cattle, cut out, rope, and throw. He pulled upon the rope and the animal braced itself against the pressure. Then, after he had called down to Hartland, Cram told Joe he would shout instructions up to him. He lowered himself over the precipice and went down the rope hand over hand, his horse bracing itself and pulling slightly.

John Cram came down near Hartland and Rose and looked questioningly at the two. Then he looked about for Creeps Hallow. But Hartland took his head and pointed over the edge of the rock.

"He jumped off?" said Cram. "Or——"

"I pushed him off!" cried Rose, impulsively. "I thought he would attack Roger and get his gun. Oh, I was so excited! I didn't mean to do it!"

"How did you get up here?" Cram asked.

"He brought me—night before last. Up a terrible trail. There are big rocks down there that he used for steps, and he dragged me up after him. He was going to take me somewhere in the top of the mountains and keep me there. He was crazy! *Crazy,* I tell you! I nearly went mad with the long night and with him. He said he had horses down there. He set my horse loose. We were to start at daybreak. He would have killed me in the end!"

"Maybe so," said Cram. "The poor fellow wasn't quite right." He shouted up to Joe to loosen the rope from the saddle horn and throw it down, and to take the horses back the way they had come into Moon Valley and wait there.

Then he and Hartland looked over the edge of the rock, and, aided by the rope, which they secured about a rock outcropping, Hartland went down the first pitch. Rose had entered the cave and put out the candle. She had her jacket on and had merely to put on her hat. When she came out, Cram tied the rope about her and lowered her. He followed, using the rope as a stay. Step by step they made their way downward until they reached the smooth, steep trail at the upper end of the shale slope. Here they came upon Creeps Hallow.

He lay on his side, his face twisted up to the stars. The hair, the brows, the beard were wet with blood. The eyes were closed.

Hartland bent over him, opening his shirt. He was breathing and the heart was beating faintly. "He isn't dead," Hartland muttered; "but he must be broken to pieces. We'll have to carry him out."

Rose Raymond knew nothing about the way they had come, when they asked her, except that they had crossed the shale on a path as thin as a knife-blade and had come up from the valley through the trees.

But John Cram knew that the path she mentioned was a game trail and that it must lead down to water; probably down into Moon Valley. Hallow hadn't come up by way of Moon Valley with Rose because he would have to leave tracks in the road over the low ridge through the valley and part way up the upper trail. But he had doubtless come the easier way this night.

Cram made an examination and found both the path leading south through the trees and the two horses which Hallow had intended for himself and Rose, and a pack animal, heavily loaded. They put Rose on one of the horses, and then Cram and Hartland picked Hallow up and carried him down to the starting point as gently as

possible. Neither expected him to live until they reached Moon Valley.

They put the injured man on the ground and John Cram went swiftly to work. He took the ax, which was twisted in the rope holding the pack on the pack horse, and cut down four young pines of the lodgepole variety, tall and slim, and trimmed them. Next he undid the pack, cut the rope into two pieces of equal length, and tied the saplings at each end so that there was a space of about a foot between them. He folded the tarpaulin in which the pack had been wrapped and put it on the saplings, thus improvising a stretcher. They lifted Hallow to the stretcher, raised it by the two outside poles, and so were able to carry the unconscious form along the path, with the saddle horse and pack horse following, and Rose Raymond bringing up the rear on the other mount.

There were frequent stops for rest, as Hallow was heavy, and the trail rough and narrow. Finally they emerged upon the main trail and with sighs of relief turned down toward Moon Valley. It was daybreak when they reached the brook in the valley and found Monocle Joe awaiting them.

Hartland dispatched Joe to town at once for the doctor and told Rose Raymond she might as well ride in with him.

"What will I say if any one wants to know where I've been?" she asked.

"Say anything you like," Hartland retorted in disgust. Then he instructed Joe to notify Ross Milton and Miller. "We will take Creeps to his cabin," he finished.

When the two had left, Hartland and John Cram carried their burden up to the cabin on the east slope. They took off Hallow's clothes and found his body a mass of bruises and cuts. There was an ugly gash in the back of his head; another on the lower left side of his face. A broken shoulder blade protruded through the skin. They heated water, washed and bandaged him as well as possible, and put him beneath the covers in the bunk. Then they went out into the brightness and the freshness of the early morn.

"I shall bring Marge up to do what she can," said John Cram.

Hartland nodded.

After that they sat in silence, waiting for the doctor.

When the doctor came at last, Creeps Hallow was muttering in delirium. The physician made an examination and worked over the injured man for more than an hour. Meanwhile, Deputy Ross Milton and Miller arrived with Joe. The latter told Hartland that Rose had gone to the hotel and he had put the horse she had ridden in the livery.

Ross Milton asked for an explanation, and Hartland told him everything in the presence of John Cram and Miller; everything except the real reason for Rose Raymond's arrival in Silver City and the exact way in which Creeps Hallow came to be injured. "He slipped and fell over the edge of the rock," he finished. "He was deathly afraid of the gun I held, and crazed with excitement."

Milton had kept his steady gaze on Hartland's eyes. Now he turned to John Cram. "Is this the way of it?" he asked quietly.

"I heard Mr. Hartland shout to Hallow to go back or he would shoot," said Cram. "Then I heard the terrible scream Hallow gave as he fell over. Hartland had the rope around him and could not have taken a step after touching the rock down there without my knowing it. He took the rope off and gave the signal that he was free. Then I took a hitch or two around my saddle horn and went down the rope. I found Hartland and the woman standing as if turned to stone. We got down an' out of there, sent Miss Raymond into town, an' brought Hallow here."

"Then it was an accident, and I'll have to report it as such," said Milton, looking straight into Hartland's eyes.

Hartland knew that the deputy had scented a flaw in the story, but with the circumstances so overwhelmingly against Hallow he would ignore it.

The doctor came out. His face was grave and he was shaking his head. "He recovered consciousness for a few moments under a stimulant," said the medical man. "But he is paralyzed. His back is broken, and his skull must be fractured. He won't live through the night."

John Cram left for home, announcing that he would return with Margaret. Ross Milton rode away to telephone to the sheriff from Hartland's bungalow. Joe accompanied him to bring back some food for Hartland.

"If it would be possible, or do any good, we could move Hallow to my place," Hartland told the doctor. "Anderson has been taken to his quarters at the mine."

"It would be senseless," said the doctor, going inside.

Hartland and Miller walked slowly about the sloping meadow in front of the cabin. Lucious green grass and wild flowers bent under their tread. A golden sun swam in a sea of torquoise. The pines were waves of beryl on the slopes of the ridges which marched up to the gleaming peaks. It was a world of sweet scents, soft breezes, and inspiring beauty; such a day as Nature should send to mark the passing of one of her wild spirits from an earthly to a celestial sphere.

Hartland stopped and spoke in a low, earnest voice. "Miller, there is something in all this." He waved an arm in a gesture which seemed to encompass the universe. "Something has been brought home to me with a bang! It is *life*—I've been living in an empty tin!"

He started on, and Miller made no comment. He sensed the troubled thoughts with which Hartland was struggling. He saw in the other's eyes the birth of an understanding—and he was content.

John Cram arrived with Margaret. The girl looked at Hartland out of large, solemn eyes. Then she held out her hand and, as Hartland grasped it, said, "I'm sorry." She went into the cabin.

Joe returned with food and Hartland ate in the shade of the poplars down by the brook. Ross Milton came back saying the sheriff did not think it necessary to come up that day. They talked idly in the cool of the trees. Afternoon came, and the day wore on. John Cram, the doctor, and Margaret, remained inside.

It was nearing sunset when the doctor came to the door of the cabin and beckoned to them. They found Creeps Hallow conscious. His face was white and softened; no longer hideous or grotesque.

"He's been talking some," the doctor whispered. "Telling Margaret and her father why—all about—everything. His mind seems clearer than I've ever known it. Must have been the blow on the head. But he's going fast. This is the final rally."

Hallow saw Hartland, and his lips trembled. He could not move a muscle of his body, otherwise. He mumbled something and Hartland bent over him. But whatever it was that the dying man wished to say, he never said it.

The looks of intelligence in his eyes clouded; then they flamed forth, wildly brilliant.

"I'll be a wind, that's what!" The lips twisted in a frothy smile. "I'll be a wind an' race down the valley an' over the mountain tops, an' you'll hear me!"

A sublime joy seemed to rest upon his face, as tho by the bedside watched. Another flicker of sanity,

and, in the brief lucid interval: "Margie can have my mine." Then the eyes closed.

Creeps Hallow's spirit winged forth on its quest at sunset.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

HARTLAND rode back to his bungalow in the gathering dusk. There Fredericks prepared a hot supper with coffee and Hartland ate abstractedly. Monocle Joe had gone to find "Squint" Evans, and the pair were to sit up with Creeps Hallow's body that night. John Cram and Margaret had gone home. Miller and Ross Milton would leave when Joe and Evans took up their vigil. Hallow was to be buried the next afternoon on the hillside near his cabin.

When he had finished his supper, Hartland busied himself at his desk. He drew a check and placed a number of bills with the check in a pocket of his wallet. Then he got his horse and rode down to the hotel. He was able to-night to ford the stream, as the water had gone down almost as suddenly as it had risen. Miller had mentioned that the men would start a newer, stronger bridge on the morrow.

Hartland's entry into the lobby of the hotel was the signal for silence and curious looks. Many of these looks were friendly and sympathetic. The clerk was obsequiously polite.

"She is in her room, sir," he said in answer to Hartland's question. "Shall I tell her you are here?"

Hartland nodded and stood by the desk until the clerk returned with the message that he was to go upstairs.

He found rose Raymond's door open. She was sitting by the table near one of the windows, looking fresh and beautiful in a mauve morning gown. Her eyes were bright and defiant, but a question glimmered in their depths.

"Well, Rose," said Hartland easily, "your work here is finished." He sat down on a chair across from her.

"Is he—is he——" Rose found herself unable to ask what was on her tongue.

"He's dead," said Hartland bluntly, noting the flush leave her cheeks. "But I didn't so much refer to Creeps Hallow. You can have *that* memory to last you the rest of your life, and I guess it'll be enough. You'll not be inconvenienced in any way, because, in the circumstances, you could not be blamed. Don't think that *I'm* blaming you, Rose, for I'm not. In fact, I feel rather sorry that your—your association, we'll say, with me, brought you this trouble. We'll pass over your move in coming here in the first place. In a way, I feel actually indebted to you." He surveyed her critically.

"In what way? Because I've given you a new thrill?" she asked sarcastically.

"I felt the thrill before you came," he said complacently. "But you've opened my eyes to some things, and I'm not going to explain them. You probably wouldn't understand, anyway. You're thinking of leaving on the morning train?"

"I suppose it would be best," she said, the dark light of defeat and anger again shining in her eyes.

"Under the circumstances, I believe it would," Hartland remarked dryly. "However, the fact that Creeps Hallow was not mentally sound has long been known hereabouts. The report has gone out that he abducted you when in the throes of a particularly bad spell, for it was only at such times that he was known to sing. His song was responsible for your discovery, or, for us discovering you. He slipped and fell in the excitement. The sheriff has accepted that version, with John Cram, Joe, and myself to back it up." He paused for a space while he lighted a

cigarette. Rose was already smoking. Then: "You can have one of the maids here help you pack. Joe will look after your luggage before train time."

"You seem to have everything planned," she said wryly. "I suppose you'll see me off—if I go."

"For the sake of appearance, I will," said Hartland. He took out his wallet, removing the slender packet of bills and the folded check. These he placed on the table before her. Then he rose.

"There's something like five hundred in cash there," he said, "and a check on a New York bank for one thousand."

Her eyes widened and a sneer curled on her lips.

"Oh, it's not as much as you expected, or wanted, or intended to demand," he said lightly. "But it's the exact amount I intended to give you from the start—out of pity. Remember that, while you're spending it, my dear. But since I first fixed the amount, I do not believe it is a charitable donation. I'm getting my money's worth. I'll see you off in the morning, as you suggested."

He left the room, closing the door after him, leaving her sitting at the table, idly flicking the ashes from her cigarette upon the bills and the folded check in front of her.

Meanwhile, Margaret Cram's feelings toward Rose Raymond had been directly opposite to those of Hartland. Margaret felt only compassion for Rose. She felt guilty, too, in a sense. For hadn't she been indirectly responsible? Creeps Hallow had told what he had heard through the open window of Hartland's living room the night of Rose Raymond's arrival. He had told why he had taken Rose to the mountain cave. He had explained everything with the simplicity of a child making a confession. And Margaret saw matters in a different light; learned something of the wiles and chicanery of that outside world of which she knew nothing except that Roger Hartland had come out of it to shape the first great climax in her life. Of Hartland she could not think intelligently. He had three personalities in her eyes; the man of the world, the man of promise, and—— She put aside the recurring thought of that other personality time after time. For it was the personality that she loved. She lay awake most of the night and could not get to sleep until she had decided to visit Rose Raymond in the morning.

When her father left for Creeps Hallow's cabin after breakfast, Margaret saddled her horse and rode down to the hotel. She asked to see Rose.

"Miss Raymond left for New York on the morning train," the clerk informed her.

Silver City scented a fresh sensation during this last week in June. The town was crowded, overflowing its original boundaries as new arrivals flocked to the new boom camp created through the efforts of Herbert Mann. But, although Mann bustled about, mysteriously important, arranging for the opening of the Consolidated office the next Monday, there was a furtive look of worry in his eyes. Alex Gordon, too, appeared nervous. Only Butch Allen was calm and unperturbed; cheerful, in fact. He was known as one of "the big three," which included Mann, Gordon, and himself. His importance had lost much of its glamour after the beating he received from Hartland, and the newcomers took little stock in the reports circulated concerning him; but the men of the Huntley, whom he had carefully picked, were with him, and half a dozen cronies—rough, dangerous men—were ever within hailing distance.

He and Mann held many secret conferences in the latter's private office, which had already been fitted up in the rear of the building the Consolidated

had rented. There was a back door to this room which opened on an alley that ran parallel with the main street behind the stores, two resorts, the post office, and the bank on the opposite side from the Silver King, the hotel, the largest store, and two cafés.

Allen entered the office by this door on Tuesday morning. He found Mann in a state of some excitement.

"I have a brand-new, sure-fire idea," said the Consolidated promoter. "When we open the sale of stock I'm going to tell 'em we intend to sink a shaft to tap the big copper deposits these yaps think are under their feet. That'll bring every one of 'em in with the last dollar he's got. We ought to take in better than fifty thousand the first three days."

Allen shrugged. "The bank will take a lot of cash on the third an' fourth," he said. "You'd better make your end of it snappy, for I'm calling the men out at midnight of the Fourth."

"Maybe we'd better wait a while longer," Mann said nervously.

"An' let Gordon have time to get cold feet about having so much cash on hand?" sneered Allen. "What's more, we've got to work fast. You can't blow up a big, soap-bubble boom like you've started here an' get away smooth as gravy when it comes to the bust. An' there's something else. My men have noticed some keen gents in town—if you know what I mean. Let some of those hombres get it into their heads that Gordon has a vault feathered with yellowbacks, an' that you've got a safe in the same enticing condition—which you *will* have soon—an' our little job will be done *for* us. Ever think of that?"

Mann's face clouded again. "There's a big risk," he said, shaking his head. "We'll lose by waiting, but I guess you're right. You're *sure* of your men? I mean the men for the big job?"

Allen laughed meanly. "Don't ask me that fool question again," he said. "An' you know they buried that lunatic Hallow yesterday."

Mann nodded but appeared puzzled.

Allen leaned on the table. "That means that Hartland has no watchman up there to start a fuss if anybody was to come around," he said softly.

"But you're not thinking of going after Hartland, are you?" Mann demanded angrily. "I told you he's dynamite an' to lay off of him. Now that's cold turkey, an' I mean it."

"Don't get excited," said Allen coolly. "I'm not going after Hartland." He swore under his breath. "The man I *am* going after is the bow-legged, little runt who grabbed my gun that night of the fight. He——"

"Maybe it's a good thing he *did* grab it," Mann interrupted. "If you had shot Hartland things would have gone to pieces right."

Allen shook his head impatiently and his eyes snapped. "Mann, will you keep your mouth shut when I'm talking? What I'm trying to get at is, Hartland may have a bunch of cash up there. He'll be gone when the big fracas is on an'—there's no sense in leaving any loose ends."

Mann shook his head. "If you think Hartland is that big a fool, you're mistaken! We'll have enough to attend to as it is. An' I wouldn't trust you within shooting range of Hartland with your gun handy. An' that little runt you're talking about is a gunman an' a killer, an' don't you forget it. I've heard a dozen who know the signs when they see them say so. Big Mose said so himself."

"All the better!" exclaimed Allen viciously. "That gives me an out."

"I should think you'd have sense enough to forget these little personal differences," Mann complained. "With big game in sight, you'd frighten it away by shooting at a rabbit!"

"What you think, an' what I do, or

intend to do, are two different things," said Allen grimly. "Now go ahead an' tell 'em you're going to put down a shaft; tell 'em *any*thing. But get the money."

He went out and Mann began puttering about his desk. He was mad, clear through. And he was beginning to have his first serious doubts. But he had gone too far in the project he had in hand with Butch Allen to back out. If he *did* back out, he would have to leave Silver City anyway—and penniless.

On Wednesday, Silver City's "regulars," and those who were interested in the Consolidated in particular, received something of a shock. In every post-office box was found an envelope, properly addressed, which when opened yielded a small, printed circular that read:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Rumors have been spread in Silver City to the effect that the undersigned paid a large sum of money for the working option on the Huntley property. These rumors are unfounded and misleading. The amount paid to Messrs. Mann and Gordon was twenty-five thousand dollars ($25,000), which was the refund of the amount they had paid on their option, and ten thousand dollars ($10,000) to be divided between the said Mann and Gordon equally as a bonus. These amounts were paid by checks, and the cancelled checks can be seen by any who are interested by applying at the offices of the Yellowjacket Mine. The undersigned wishes it understood that no extensive development was contemplated at the time and none is contemplated now. Any statement connecting the undersigned, or any property in which the undersigned is interested, with any company or corporation now existent, or being promoted, is false. Rumors in circulation have compelled the undersigned to issue this statement in his own behalf, and for the information of those who may feel inclined to place credence in unauthorized reports.

(Signed) ROGER HARTLAND.

The effect of this notice was electrical. The circulars were passed from hand to hand, and the chief reaction was one of resentment and anger toward Hartland! Mann, dismayed and enraged at first, took immediate advantage of the opportunity to spread the report that it was the first move on the part of Hartland to fight the Consolidated because he could not get control of it for himself. He implied insidiously that the temporary cessation of work at Huntley might be the forerunner of a complete shut-down; that Hartland wanted to ruin the camp and buy in the Consolidated holdings at a song. He declared as much to the miners and prospectors who had given him options on their claims or mines when they visited him in a body Wednesday afternoon.

These men, and their sympathizers, collected in a crowd in the middle of the street. They were in a dangerous mood, fired by Mann's vituperations directed at Hartland, and angry at the thought that Hartland's statement might frustrate their efforts to sell their holdings at a good figure, or to receive nice blocks of stock in the Consolidated in exchange for them. They talked and milled about until Butch Allen plunged into their midst, waving his arms for silence. Then they quieted down and listened.

"Why don't you come-ons go to this Hartland an' ask him what he's tryin' to do!" Allen shouted. "He's playin' you for a bunch of pin-headed saps, an' you're letting him get away with it! Make him come clean! He's tryin' to bust the Consolidated with his Eastern methods without giving it a chance to make good! Is that a square deal? Put it up to him so he'll know you mean business before it's too late. Maybe he's left town by now! Maybe he thinks he——"

Allen's words were drowned in a roar of angry voices. "Let's go!" came the cry. Then the crowd, which had become a seething mob, started up the

street on the way to Hartland's bungalow.

Monocle Joe, who had hovered on the edge of the throng, both in the big, vacant, front room which was to be the Consolidated's main office and in the street, now shuffled into the Silver King and winked a signal to Squint Evans, who was playing cards.

Squint shortly joined him behind the resort, and they made their way along the streets on the bank of the stream, Joe talking while they hurried on. When they reached the ford where the bridge had been they found themselves ahead of the approaching mob. They waded through the water and hastened up to the bungalow.

Hartland, who had been sitting in a chair on the veranda, rose as they hurried to the steps.

"Inside," said Joe sharply, climbing the steps and walking quickly into the living room, Squint Evans following.

Hartland entered after them and his puzzled expression gave way to a look of grim satisfaction as Joe explained what he had heard Mann say to the crowd, and how Butch Allen had stirred them and spurred them on.

"They're pushing things to a showdown quicker than I expected," he said when Joe had finished. "It's the old story about giving a man enough rope——" He turned on Evans. "Squint, would you be willing to draw with this Allen?" he asked quietly.

"Yes." The answer came in a lisp.

Sounds of a commotion came to them from the lower side of the park. Hartland looked out the door and saw the mob splashing across the stream. The ringleaders must have decided that it was too much of a walk to go around by the upper bridge. The original delegation of two score or so, which had visited Mann, had swelled to two hundred as other scores had joined out of curiosity or because of sympathetic leanings.

"Stay here," Hartland told Monocle Joe and Evans. Then he went out on the veranda to the top of the steps and waited.

The crowd formed a semicircle about the front of the veranda and packed the little park nearly down to the stream. A large, florid man stepped out as spokesman. His coat sleeves were tight about his great muscles; his gnarled hands were hooked, as if more accustomed to gripping a drill and hammer than to hanging idly at his sides; his face was scarred, and he wore a thick stubble of black beard, but his hard, level gaze was honest enough as he looked straight into Hartland's eyes.

"Mr. Hartland, we're here to find out a few things," he said. "We represent the bunch that's given options to the Consolidated, an' we have as big an interest in the camp as you have—more, maybe, because we're poor men an' not millionaires. We want to know——"

He paused as Hartland held up a hand. The crowd pressed forward, very still, ready to listen now that they were actually confronted by the man whom they held responsible for Silver City's destiny.

"I know what you want to know," said Hartland in a ringing voice that carried to every ear. "Mann's speech to you and what Allen had to say have been reported to me. You want a showdown, and you're going to get it."

He paused while his eyes searched the sea of faces. Then, at the edge of the crowd, down the slope near the stream, he saw Allen and Mann. At once he began speaking again, and his words carried fire to the ears of his listeners.

"It was the notice I issued this morning that started you on this rampage. That is just as well. I know all about the hints, the false reports, and the veiled innuendoes, directly or indirectly circulated by word of mouth, by looks, by sly winks, by mysterious suggestions

to the effect that I paid a huge sum for the Huntley lease and option and that I planned extensive developments. It was Herbert Mann and his gunman-henchman, Butch Allen, who did this work. I had to spike these false reports because when the Consolidated bubble burst it would be I who would be blamed. Now, I have two things to tell you. I don't *have* to tell you anything. I am not the guardian of you or of this camp. I didn't induce you to put your names on any dotted lines. If I was playing you for a bunch of pin-headed saps, as Allen would have you believe, I wouldn't have said a word—wouldn't be talking to you now. It's because I want to be fair that I'm telling you *why* I finally took over the Huntley."

Hartland could see Mann holding Butch Allen by the arm. The others were pressing forward behind their leader, their eyes fixed on Hartland's face, their ears alert to his every word.

"When I came here, Mann asked me to put in with the Consolidated, which was then a private enterprise between himself and Alex Gordon. I refused, and he tried to bulldoze me into it. He failed in that. Then an attack was made upon me and upon the Yellowjacket miners and property. This move was engineered by Butch Allen, and I took over the Huntley for the one and simple reason that I wanted to get him out of it and prevent further trouble. I had no thought of any big developments in that mine; but I did not intend, and do not intend *now*, to shut down the mine indefinitely unless I'm compelled to do so. But it is evident that I haven't stopped the trouble. Allen sent you up here. Now I ask, what is *he* doing for the camp? Who does he represent? What is his position here?"

Hartland was looking over the heads of the throng to where Mann and some others were struggling with Allen, holding him back. The crowd craned their necks in that direction, but Hartland claimed their attention immediately.

"Allen has made this a personal issue," he sang out. "He has slandered me, turned your attention to me for some secret purpose of his own—even if that purpose is merely to try to get even with me for defying him. He wants revenge for his injured reputation as a bad man. I gave him fists, but he wants guns! I'm not a gunman, but I have a man in my employ who can handle a six-shooter fairly well. Allen is in hearing distance. If he must have gun play, he can have it now with a man who is, at least, a match for him. Squint, come here!"

The crowd held its breath as a diminutive figure slipped out the door behind Hartland, and stole with catlike tread to the grass below the steps. It was the mild, little gambler they had known as Smith. But these men were from hills and plains; they knew the half crouch, the narrowed lids, the tight lips, the blue-green flame of the eyes of the natural-born gun fighter. They saw one before them, and then they turned to a man and looked behind toward the spot where Butch Allen stood, black-faced, eyes flaming, hesitating—hesitating——

Suddenly some one in the crowd laughed, and that laugh drove Allen away, with Mann and his cronies pulling him along.

"Now the other thing."

Hartland was smiling, holding up his hand; Squint Evans was leisurely walking away.

"I am closing down the Huntley for a few days for a reorganization and an expert inspection of the mine," said Hartland, his eyes sparkling with satisfaction and excitement. "I am not a mining man, nor will I take the word of any *one* man who *is* an expert, even though it be my manager, Frank Miller, whom many of you must know. I have sent for engineers who are this minute

on their way to Silver City. If these engineers—men of international reputation—report favorably on the Yellowjacket, *I'll sink!* That's all."

The breathless silence which followed this announcement suddenly exploded in a mighty cheer. Hats went sailing into the air, men pounded each other on the back, tears came into the eyes of old prospectors who had never lost faith. Silver City was to have its chance. At last they would know if their convictions were well-founded. Money was nothing to Hartland; Hartland was everything to them. They crowded in a dense jam in front of the bungalow, cheering and cheering. Strangers and old-timers alike caught the inspiration. Hartland waved his hand and went into the house.

Then the mad rush into town began.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

THE crowd surged into the Silver King and found Herbert Mann and Butch Allen already there, surrounded by half a dozen of the latter's cronies. Allen was grim and glowering, but Mann's eyes were sparkling. All trace of worry, of furtiveness, was gone. He rapped sharply on the bar with a twenty-dollar gold piece.

"Boys," he cried in his old, loud, blustering voice, "the promoter of the Consolidated is buying a drink for the house if it takes every cent of the five-thousand-dollar bonus Hartland says I got for selling the Huntley option! Step up an' take 'em fast an' make room for the next man. Then I'm going to tell you something that'll be just as interesting as what Hartland said."

The crowd was in a happy mood, although many of the strangers did not quite understand it all. They jostled about the bar, taking their drinks on Mann, thinking to themselves that here was real boom-town spirit.

Mann did not wait until all had been served. He climbed on a table and waved his hands for silence. His face was flushed with excitement. Hartland's speech had given him the greatest inspiration of his life. It had done more! He was beginning to *believe* in the company's venture. He realized his golden opportunity. He had, for the time being, forgotten that other project which Butch Allen represented.

"You all heard what Hartland said, boys," he roared when his audience was at attention; "it hardly seems necessary for me to say anything, but I'm going to talk for the benefit of those who do not understand conditions. Gordon and I gave up the Huntley for the money he says he paid us because we wanted that money—*needed* it—to get the Consolidated started *right*. Our properties are ten times as large as Hartland's! He told you he wanted the Huntley because he wanted to discharge my foreman, Allen. Do you believe that? Of course you don't! Now he announces that he has sent for mining engineers an' that if their report is favorable, he'll sink. He says he'll sink in the Yellowjacket. You *bet* he'll sink in the Yellowjacket! He intended to do that from the first. Do you suppose he'd be sending for high-priced engineers if the Yellowjacket's showing didn't warrant it? Not on your life! I tell you, boys, the Yellowjacket has got the goods. They're going down for the copper an' *they know they're going to get it!* The ore indications and stains probably show that the Huntley has it, too; for the Huntley adjoins the Yellowjacket. That's why he wanted the Huntley. An' that's another reason why we let him have it. So he would go ahead an' sink; because every dollar he spends in development will go to prove the value of the Consolidated holdings. Every word Hartland spoke this afternoon—an' he spoke a mouthful—went to show that the

Consolidated is *not* a bubble; that Silver City's boom isn't hot air; an' if Consolidated stock, which goes on sale next Monday, isn't worth five times, or *ten* times what it cost within a year, I'll blow my brains out in the middle of the street an' you can throw what's left of me to the coyotes!"

He finished hoarse and perspiring, and got down from the table with good-natured cheers ringing in his ears. None there but felt that there was logic in what he had said. Only Butch Allen remained passive, his darting glances roving over the crowd. Now and then he spoke to some of his companions. Gradually it became noised about that it was Mann who had prevented him from meeting Hartland's gunman openly before the crowd, because he, Mann, thought it would give the camp a black eye. And it was whispered that Allen was eagerly awaiting an opportunity to draw against the mild little gambler they had known as Smith. Any day now might witness the spectacle of two killers going for their guns!

It was the old, thrilling stuff a boom camp loves.

Hartland stood by the table in his living room until the crowd had gone. The smile of satisfaction on his face gave way to a frown. He had, so he thought, pricked the Consolidated bubble; but, at the same time, he had placed himself in a position where he was responsible for the future of the camp. The decision he had made the night he took supper with the Crams had now made him the instigator of a boom. The very fact that he was bringing in experts showed, at least, that he *contemplated* development, and he had told the crowd as much. He had acknowledged that he would sink if the engineers' reports were favorable. As he thought of this, he suddenly realized that this announcement would react as a stimulus for Consolidated promotion. Prospective investors might wait until after the engineers' reports became known. There would be no keeping the nature of these reports secret, for the activities at the mine would tell the story. If he sank, Consolidated stock would sell and soar. He saw then that it was inevitable that he would have to take control of the Consolidated, for he knew Mann's stamp of promoter; knew that he would wreck the company he headed and make trouble. Yes, he—Hartland—was involved in the network of Silver City's destinies to such an extent that he could not extricate himself by the easy method of merely leaving the camp to itself. He could not do so and retain his self-respect; he could not do so and be true to that motive within him which had prompted his actions of late.

He went into the kitchen expecting to find Monocle Joe and Squint Evans there. It was nearly five o'clock, and he knew that Joe and Fredericks were in the habit of taking tea at that hour. But neither man he sought was there. Fredericks, pale and nervous, hadn't seen them.

Hartland stamped through the house to the veranda. At the top of the steps his whole manner changed. His face softened and lightened, his eyes brightened and shone. He had not seen Margaret Cram except during the brief ceremony of burying Creeps Hallow since the Sunday when she had attended the dying man. Now she was dismounting by the steps.

He hurried down and took her horse. "I'll lead him around into the shade," he said. "Sit down on the divan, Margaret."

When he returned, he sat down beside her. Never had she looked so beautiful as on that late afternoon, he thought. June! Sunshine, green trees, and grass, kindly skies, the sweet scent of countless blossoms—the month love

claimed as its own! Her hands were in her lap and he put his own upon them.

"What did you come to tell me?" he asked.

"That I'm an eavesdropper," she answered lightly, withdrawing her hands. "I was riding into town and saw the crowd. I edged over by the creek and heard every word you said. Then I galloped back around by the upper bridge and came to tell you how proud I am of you. Why did you do it, Roger?"

"Because of you," he replied bluntly. "I made up my mind the night I had supper at your house."

"Oh!" Her eyes were wide, swimming with mysterious lights. "You decided to buy me—*that* way?"

"Exactly." His voice was precise. "But now I feel differently. I don't want to buy you that way, nor any other way save by paying the price you mentioned. You said your price was love. You have mine. And the wonderful part of it all is, that I have yours!"

"What—*what* are you saying?" Her hands came up to her breast and she looked at him wide-eyed, startled.

"Didn't you know it?" he said softly, putting his arms about her. "Perhaps you suspected it, but wouldn't confess it even to yourself. Anyway, it's true. And I've learned two of the things that I think you had in mind when you said there were three things I had to learn about woman. First I had to learn to really *love* one for her own sweet, dear self; then I had to experience the thrill of knowing that she loved me. That thrill is mine this minute. I suppose the third thing to learn is the love of a home and children, and the joy of making the woman of my choice happy —and *keeping* her happy. That thrill, too, is going to be mine."

He raised her face, kissed her lips. Her arm stole about his neck for a few moments, then she drew away from his embrace.

"Roger, you don't know what you're saying!" She flushed, then grew pale. There were deep, gleaming lights of happiness in her eyes. "It's your imagination running free again. It's the subtle, hypnotic spell of the hills. It's —it's——"

"It's *you!*" he interposed. "To put it rudely, I've got wise to myself—and to life. This mining business means nothing to me—I'll be frank!—these hills mean something, I guess, but you mean everything." He took her in his arms again.

"Kiss me, Margaret!" It was an authoritative command, rather than a request.

But that side of his personality which she loved was dominant. She surrendered.

"I am sorry for you, Roger," she whispered.

"Sorry?" He drew back. "Don't you know if there's anything a man, who *is* a man, hates and abhors it is having a person feel sorry for him?" He was almost angry.

"And I was sorry for Miss Raymond," she said softly. "I went down to see her the morning after—after the funeral. But she had gone. She might have loved you, Roger—who knows? But I don't blame *you*."

"Don't blame me?" He rose and stood above her. "Margaret, you don't think—you don't think——"

"I don't allow myself to think," the girl said firmly. "I only know what Creeps Hallow told me, and what my father told me when Creeps made him break his trust not to tell. I only know the impression she made upon me. And I don't care! You understand, Roger? You were right! I *do* love you—and I don't care!"

"Great heavens!" Hartland's exclamation was reverent rather than otherwise. His face was white, drawn.

Then suddenly he smiled. He sat down again, close to her, took her hands.

"I can't expect everything," he said slowly. "I never thought until recently that it might be in the picture for me to be genuinely and thoroughly happy—to love life for itself. When you forget what you say you won't think about, and *believe* in me, that time will come. It is said that the eyes are the mirrors of a man's soul. Look into mine!"

Margaret locked her troubled gaze with his. What was this she had done? What was this different phase of his nature? *Did* she love him? Or were the restless spirits of the hills playing with *her* imagination? Or did she know anything at all except that she was a silly, young girl!

Her lips brushed his. "I'm going, Roger," she whispered. "When I come to you again, you will know."

Three of the engineers arrived on the night train. Miller met them, and they went to the quarters which had been made ready for them in the best of the Yellowjacket bunk houses. These accomodations had been made as comfortable as any the hotel could offer. The experts began their inspection of the Yellowjacket and the mineral showings and rock outcroppings in the vicinity. Hartland spent all of Thursday at the mine, and the next night Hale arrived from New York. Hale was one of the three most famous mining experts, with an international record of achievement. He became a guest at Hartland's bungalow.

It was an exciting end to the month of June. Silver City seethed with speculation and rumor—and held its breath. Not a word of what the engineers said or thought leaked out; but the fact that they were there, and were doing their work thoroughly, was enough. Hale's name was magic; it was whispered in reverence by the old-timers, spoken always in a tone of respect by others. It became known that the temporary shut-down of the Huntley at midnight on Sunday was to presage the thorough examination of that mine.

Butch Allen and the few closest to him played cards consistently in the rear rooms of the booming resorts. Alex Gordon was feverishly excited and a bit bewildered by the sudden prosperity of the camp. He had to send for another experienced teller for his bank. Herbert Mann had supervised the furnishing of the Consolidated office and by Sunday everything was in readiness for the launching of the stock sale.

Mann was pacing his private office Sunday night in the last glimmer of the dusk when there was a knock on the rear door. He opened it stealthily to admit Butch Allen.

The gunman looked at him searchingly. He had seen little of Mann since the day the crowd had gone to Hartland's place. As he inspected him now he noted a change in the promoter's look and manner.

"Light the lamp," he ordered, "so I can see you better."

"Not so loud," Mann admonished, glancing at the open window. He lighted the lamp and met Allen's gaze with a question in his eyes.

The gunman did not appear altogether satisfied with what he saw. "Look here, Mann," he gritted through his teeth suddenly, "you're gettin' mighty well worked up about this Consolidated business, eh? Think it's going over big?"

"That's just what I'm thinking," Mann confessed. "In fact, I *know* it's going over big. You know, Butch, I think there's something in this scheme after all. At last Hartland is really interested and going ahead. What's more, I think I've guessed the reason, an' if I *have,* well—he'll never back out."

"Yeah?" sneered Allen. "An' what's his reason?"

"Margaret Cram," Mann whispered. "He's taken a shine to her. He's been seen with her several times since he came here, had her up to his place for lunch an' one thing an' another, introduced that red woman to her, an' now Gordon tells me he's let her father have five thousand dollars to take up his notes an' go ahead with his development. I'll bet *she* got him to do that."

"An' what's that got to do with us?" Allen demanded harshly.

"Not much, maybe, but then again——" Mann paused, undecided.

Allen leaned on the back of a chair and looked straight into Mann's troubled eyes. "Tell me," he said, in a voice that struck a chill to his listener's nerves, "are you getting cold feet?"

"Of course not," Mann protested nervously. Then he seemed to gather himself together, with a shrug. "But I can't help thinking, Allen, that there might be something bigger in this Consolidated business, as you call it, than we ever suspected. Maybe we're going off half cocked, an'—an' half loaded."

"Listen to me." Allen's eyes were gleaming between their narrowed lids. The words cut the stillness of the room like a razor-edged blade. "I've taken about everything this Eastern snob of a tenderfoot you call Hartland had to offer. I don't know as he'll *ever* find out how lucky he's been. It galls me to think that. An' I've kept off that little runt of a would-be gun fighter of his so far because if I shot him to pieces it might interfere with our plans. He'll get his later. But I want *you* to know that if you even look as if you're gettin' cold feet, or even think of double-crossing me, I'll send you to death with your toes kickin' if I have to fight my way past Old Nick himself!"

Mann was staring, terror-struck, his face blanching to a sickly greenish-white.

Allen was satisfied with the effect he thought his threat had been on the promoter. He turned without noting that Mann was staring past him at the window where he had seen the flash of a narrow, bronzed face.

At the door, Allen spoke again in a soft, hissing voice. "At midnight on the Fourth, I'll tell you the hour." Then he went out.

A croaking gurgle came from Mann's throat as he listened for the shot. But no report of a gun broke on the night air. No shot! But Hartland's gunman had been out there, listening at the window! No shot! Did it mean that there would be another with whom to divide the spoils? Mann dropped into a chair, limp and cold, yet perspiring. He mopped his brow and blubbered, watching the door—expecting a visitor who was not to come.

At midnight the shift went off at the Huntley and the men sought the bunk houses for a good sleep in anticipation of a four-day celebration. There was no disorder.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TWO NOTICES.

HERBERT MANN was up and about at dawn on Monday morning, the first of July. In the excitement and flurry of launching the Consolidated, he forgot the gnawing worry of the night when he had tossed and turned in his bed, seeing the burning eyes of Butch Allen, and that pinched, narrow face at the window.

The front of the office was hung with bunting, flags fluttered overhead. Others along the street caught the early spirit of the forthcoming holiday—the Fourth of July—and soon most of the buildings were similarly decorated. Young firs were cut and brought in to stand at corners, be tied to posts, made into wreaths, adding a refreshing touch of green to the dusty street.

The sale of Consolidated stock was to open sharp at noon. Fifteen minutes before this hour the office was packed and the street jammed with an uproarious crowd. A board had been rigged on a wall in the Silver King where Consolidated and other stocks were to be listed and prices quoted. To all outward appearances, Silver City now was a genuine boom town.

The throng cheered enthusiastically as the postmaster was honored, on the stroke of twelve, by being allowed to purchase the first share. The official was followed by others, by scores of Huntley men who had been advised to buy; and then that strange, inexplicable force which is characteristic of a boom camp and is nothing more than an impulse of the moment swept the crowd off its feet in a wild rush to buy the only stock offered in the renewed diggings. The frenzy of speculation seized conservative and reckless souls alike. Stock certificates, already signed, could hardly be filled out fast enough by Mann and an assistant in the rear office. Money poured in, and when the first sale of one hundred shares in a lump was made, Mann came out into the main office waving the certificate, and, jumping on a chair behind the counter, made a ringing speech that was cheered to the echo.

The gold-and-green-edged certificates, with their red seals, seemed in an hour's time to endow the boom with the substantiality of permanent prosperity. No one would think of going about without at least one share of Consolidated. The very name of the company was a lure. And the money poured in. Mann could think of nothing now but stock and money.

All the Huntley men were on holiday and all had half a month's wages or more in pocket. By sundown every resort was crowded. The addition to the Silver King had been rushed and, although the floor and walls were plain boards, it was being used. More celebrants were coming up from the lowlands and prairie towns; for the word had gone out that Silver City would be the place to spend the Fourth.

Mann had placed his safe in a prominent corner behind the counter of the front office. A lamp in a reflector bracket was left burning above it so that it could readily be seen through the front windows. But then, he reasoned, no one would suspect that he had a large sum in the safe. When he closed the office at nine o'clock, locked the doors and left, he did not know how much he had taken in that day. His nerves were too frayed and he was too tired to figure up the stock sale. But he was jubilant, for it looked as though Consolidated were going over with a bang.

He went into the Silver King to get a drink before going to eat. And this was a night when he certainly needed sleep.

Allen sauntered up to him as he came out of the resort. Mann did not attempt to conceal the satisfaction in his eyes.

"It's a knock-out," he said to Allen in a low voice. "If we didn't take in twenty, probably twenty-five, thousand, I'm a liar. An' we've got three days or so to go yet."

"Go get some sleep," said Allen. "The boys an' myself will keep an eye on the diggings across the street."

Mann ate absently. Allen had meant the safe in the office, of course. They would keep an eye on it. Oh, the money would be safe enough until—— He put down his knife and fork suddenly and stared unseeing straight ahead. Allen and the men who were with him in the bank deal were watching the money. He was being watched himself, undoubtedly. For the first time he realized how completely he was in Allen's power. Suppose Allen were to have the same thought he had had

himself—the thought that there were too many to go shares with? What was to stop Allen and his men from leaving him dead by the trail when they made their get-away? They might be able to do it in a way which would make it look as if he, Mann, had been responsible for the whole business!

Mann half rose from his chair, then sat down suddenly. He had had no word from the gunman whom Hartland had called "Squint." Yet he knew Squint was aware that something big was in the wind. Had he told Hartland? Fear gripped the promoter's heart. Why hadn't he told Allen? Allen would see that Squint was fixed mighty quick. He would have to see Allen and tell him.

He left the table and went in search of the gunman, but everywhere he went he was immediately surrounded by a crowd, and he had to give it up. Anyway, what difference would that night make? He yawned. The town was ablaze. It would be that way until after the Fourth. He went to the hotel, to his room, and to bed.

Tuesday was another banner day for Consolidated. Mann was again kept busy filling out certificates. But the demand for stock fell off in the afternoon and then Alex Gordon came in.

"I thought you would want to make a deposit," he said pointedly. "You must have a big bunch of money here, Mann, and this isn't as safe a place for it as in the bank."

"That's right, that's right," said Mann hastily, fussing with the sheets of figures he had apparently been totalling. "Just as soon as I can get things straightened out, I'll be in. This has been a big rush an' it isn't over, Alex. I'll be in as soon as I can."

"Perhaps my new clerk can help you," Gordon suggested. "He is an experienced man in such things. I can take his place at the window for a while."

"No, it won't be necessary," Mann said irritably. "Just leave me alone an' I'll make out all right, Alex. We'll have to get together an' go over everything after this rush—after the Fourth. But we've got a winner. You can see how busy I am."

Gordon went out, but returned shortly with some stout, canvas sacks such as are used by banks for holding cash. "If you want to put the money in these sacks for me to put in the vault you can bring them in by five o'clock," he said. "And I wouldn't advise you to be counting large sums of money in here, either. You can do that later in the bank where it'll be safer."

Mann sat for some little time staring at the sacks on his desk. He hadn't liked Gordon's look or the tone of his voice. And what he had said last had conveyed the impression that he was giving a command rather than making a suggestion. And Alex Gordon's office with the Consolidated was that of treasurer!

Mann upbraided himself for a fool. Of course he couldn't keep all that cash in the safe in the front office! It was but natural that Gordon should expect him to put it in the bank vault. That was where it belonged! It was common sense. And, since Allen and his bank bandits were going to blow the vault anyway, what difference would it make if the money was there or in the office safe? Allen should have thought of these things.

Gradually a great light dawned upon Herbert Mann. Allen *had* thought of this! He was playing him, Mann, for a come-on; letting him do the dirty work, as it were, and raise a big sum on Consolidated stock so that he and his gang could get away with it. He had no intention of splitting with him! Instead of his double crossing Allen, the gunman intended to double cross *him* and then kill him into the bargain!

The more Mann thought along this line the stronger became his conviction that Allen planned to make him his dupe. And at heart Mann was a coward. Suppose he were to go through with Allen and the latter really intended to play square? How about the men with him? Mann didn't know one of them. There was a terrible risk. A slip could mean but one thing or the other: death or prison. Yet here he had manufactured a boom and had actually started the Consolidated. Why —it struck him with the suddenness of a lightning bolt—if Hartland *did* sink and get copper, the Consolidated was made—absolutely *made!* And the stockholders would have made a gilt-edged investment, and he would have made a fortune, made legitimately and aboveboard. It was taking a chance to hang on, but wasn't it worth it?

Mann paced his private office, stopping only when a clerk came in to get a stock certificate and pay in money. His face was set in thought—thoughts so daring and dangerous that he seemed to contemplate them as from a distance. At the end of an hour he mopped his damp brow with his handkerchief and looked about as if the room appeared strange to him. He had made his decision. He would deal Allen the double cross instead of getting it himself, and bask in the brave light of heroism into the bargain!

He took the money from the drawer of his desk and from the safe and put it in three of the bags. He took these, left by the front entrance, and walked boldly down to the bank. He found Gordon in his private office and tossed the sacks one by one on the banker's desk.

"Put those in the vault, Alex," he said, "and remember I don't know *yet* what's in them. I haven't checked over the amount."

"That's all right," said Gordon. "I'll seal them."

Mann left, conscious of Gordon's stare at his back.

He walked back to his office in an angry mood. He was annoyed at Gordon. The banker's look had been downright suspicious. He hated Allen! At best Allen was a ruffian, a bandit, a gun fighter, a crooked gambler and a killer. He winced at the last term. But he had only to slip a word to Hartland and he would have the young millionaire behind him. What if this Squint *had* told Hartland anything? Nothing had been done, as yet; there was no proof against him; he could say he had been stringing Allen along because the man had threatened him. After all, Squint had heard nothing except Allen's threat in the event of his, Mann's, double-crossing him, and Allen's vow that he would get Squint himself. He had nothing to report. Mann was shrewd enough to suspect that it was Miller who had hired the gunman in the first place. Perhaps it would be well to see this Squint and have a confidential talk with him. But Mann knew it would be impossible to see *any*body without the meeting, and perhaps the conversation, being reported to Allen. He was closely watched.

He hadn't been in his office ten minutes when Allen entered.

Mann frowned when he saw him. Strange he should be cool before this man after the decision he had made. But his coolness gave him confidence.

"You shouldn't walk in here so openly during the day," he told Allen. "You know how things stand, an' folks will be asking each other questions."

"I saw you goin' down to the bank —loaded," said Allen, ignoring the other's remark.

"Gordon was here," said Mann irritably. "Wanted to know when I was going to bank the money. Said it wasn't even safe to count it here. He acted an' talked like he was suspicious. An' he was right. We were fools to

think we could stuff that dinky safe out there with yellowbacks an' not start Gordon thinking, an' maybe talking. He's treasurer of the company, you know."

Allen hadn't taken his eyes from Mann's. "So he is," he said at length. "Maybe we had the wrong hunch, eh?"

"Certainly we did," said Mann, looking down at his desk. Then he raised his eyes. He was a little pale, but he met the big man's gaze squarely. "There's only one way to work this thing an' that's for me to attend to *my* end, an' for you to attend to *your* end, an'——"

"You mean for me to attend to the *big* end," Allen interrupted grimly. "An' what else did you have to say?"

"I was going to ask what difference it would make whether we copped the money here or in Gordon's vault," said Mann.

"Reckon it wouldn't make any difference a-tall," said Allen as the clerk came in to get a stock certificate.

When Mann had attended to the clerk, he looked up to find that Allen had gone. Then he remembered the peculiar tone of voice Allen had used when making his parting remark. The furtive, worried look came back into his eyes. Did they understand each other? His fingers trembled and his lips twitched with nervousness. Perhaps he had got himself in a hole he couldn't crawl out of as easily as he thought. But he had two days left.

The engineers had "experted" the Huntley during the first two days of July. Hale spent most of Tuesday in the Yellowjacket. That night he handed his report to Hartland in the presence of the other engineers and Miller. The single typewritten line at the bottom of the report was what interested Hartland most. It read:

I recommend further prospecting below the six-hundred-foot level for copper showings.

The engineers left next morning. At noon on this day before the Fourth an envelope was delivered to Hartland at his bungalow. When he opened it he found it contained a notice to the effect that:

Unless R. T. (Butch) Allen is given back his place as foreman of the Huntley, we, the undersigned employees of that mine, will refuse to return to work at midnight, July 4th, as requested.

It was signed by more than a hundred men, and Hartland was told over the telephone shortly afterward by Monocle Joe that a duplicate of the notice had been posted on the board in the Silver King. He asked Joe to report at the bungalow and gave him a paper to be handed to Big Mose for posting on the board.

In less than an hour, Silver City was reading:

NOTICE

Any man who refuses to report for work at the Huntley will not again be employed on my properties.

Miners are wanted for the Huntley and the Yellowjacket. (Signed)

ROGER HARTLAND.

Herbert Mann, white and furious, sputtered and fumed in his office and looked helplessly at the grave face of Alex Gordon. He had not known that this thing was to be done. Allen was mad to lay half his cards on the table thirty-six hours ahead of time. Mann wanted to tell Gordon the truth, but his sense of caution whispered, "Not yet!"

He listened to Gordon's tirade with the instinctive feeling that other ears were listening, too. He knew he was a marked man. Finally he broke into the banker's outpouring.

"When you're through, get out," he cried shrilly. "I have no more control over the Huntley men an' Allen than *you* have!"

Sheriff Robert Currie arrived in Silver City at daybreak.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE HOUR!

THE morning of Independence Day was clear and bright, with golden sunshine flooding the green loveliness of the hills, and a mild breeze tempering the heat. Before the sun had climbed above the shoulders of Old Baldy most of the town was astir. Every one was on holiday save the few required to look after the mines, and they were working special, short shifts. Buckboards and spring wagons climbed the road from the Basin ranches and towns loaded with merrymakers. Silver City's dusty street was thronged; cafés, resorts, stores, refreshment stands, were crowded. Bunting and flags waved and fluttered in the breeze. A band in gold and blue, imported from a town sixty miles away, played stirring airs. Everywhere the spirit of carnival was rampant.

Herbert Mann made his way across the street from the hotel to his offices, looking neither to the right nor left; ignoring the friendly or hilarious salutations of celebrants who knew him; intent upon what he had come to believe was to be his fate this day. He had dreamed of shooting and blood—blood flowing red over yellow bills! An omen!

It was after nine o'clock. He nodded perfunctorily to the three clerks waiting for him, unlocked the front door, passed through the main office to his private room in the rear. There he hung up his hat, raised the window, and sat down at his desk to confront again the problem that had put fresh gray hairs in his head during the night.

Allen had said he would tell him the hour at midnight. So Allen expected him there at midnight. Where would he be an hour afterward? He shivered. His face was gray, his brow furrowed and damp. A clerk came in and said that people who had bought stock were asking what effect Hartland's notice concerning the men who refused to return to work in the Huntley would have on the Consolidated.

"Tell them it will not affect the company," said Mann wearily. "Tell them the Consolidated is not interested in the Huntley and that Hartland's big development will be in the Yellowjacket. Say that the Consolidated has a card up its sleeve and that I'll have a statement to make to-morrow."

"That'll stall them off until—until ——" He was mumbling thus to himself after the clerk went out.

There were no sales that morning. Might as well close the office, he thought. But what would Allen think —or do? And where would he, Mann, go? Why shouldn't he put it straight to Allen that he, Allen, could go through with his plans *alone?* Or how could he get in touch with Hartland? The telephone! And every one in the office listening? It would be a long explanation. Hartland could not be seen coming to the office, either. In his frenzy, Mann failed to see how he could get in touch with Hartland; failed to realize that it would take but a few words to give away the plot. His thoughts continually reverted to himself. It was the saving of his own skin that was uppermost in his mind.

A tall, soldierly figure loomed in the doorway, and Mann looked about, startled, to see Sheriff Currie. His heart gave a bound. *His chance!* Instinctively he looked out the window. A man, no—two men! were lounging out there within hearing and seeing distance. Allen had his sentinels always on guard.

"Howdy, sheriff," Mann managed to say, summoning his old reserve of blustering cheerfulness. "Looks like Silver City's big day, doesn't it?"

"Everywhere except in here," said the official. "Your business seems pretty slack." He had been eying the

promoter keenly. "You don't look any too pert yourself," he observed.

"Tired," said Mann with a frown. He was careful to speak loudly. "I've had a mighty busy three days. I suppose you've heard how Hartland is going ahead up here? Of course you've talked with him. Well, I've put the Consolidated over, an' we're going to *do* things."

"Yes, I understand Hartland received a favorable report from Hale and the other experts," said the sheriff. "That ought to help the Consolidated—if it's managed properly."

Mann's eyes had lighted with fierce interest when Currie mentioned the engineers' report. And he didn't mistake the meaning of the official's last statement.

"You needn't worry," he said heartily; "the Consolidated will be managed by the most able men we can get."

"Do you need Butch Allen?" Currie asked sharply.

"I—I—why I might give him a job, if that's what you mean." Mann could not help stammering. He glanced out the window. The eavesdroppers were still there.

"Are you sure you know what *you* mean?" asked the sheriff.

"Oh, I know you're thinking about the Huntley walk-out," said Mann. "I had nothing to do with that. It hasn't helped us any, as you can see. I'm not interested in the Huntley except that I'd like to see it being worked. I hired Allen for a foreman because he could handle men. Hartland has ridden him to death, an'—— But I have nothing to do with it. If the Huntley men want him back an' are ready to walk out thinking it'll *get* him back, I can't help it."

"Don't you think maybe Allen started all this?" the sheriff persisted.

"Maybe he did, for all *I* know," Mann retorted angrily. "If he did, *I* couldn't have stopped him. *I* have no control over him now."

Currie's eyes were gleaming; his face was set in stern lines. "It might be just as well if you closed your office for the day," he said. "Of course, that's just a suggestion." He turned on his heel and left.

A suggestion? Mann knew better. And the two eavesdroppers had heard. He looked quickly out the window and saw they had gone. He closed the offices at one o'clock.

He crossed to the Silver King, where a place was made for him at the bar. "Nothing to say," he told his eager questioners. "To-morrow I'll *tell* you something. *To-morrow!*" Then, to Big Mose, as the latter put out a bottle and glasses: "You can post it on your board that the report of Hartland's engineers was O. K."

"So I heard," said Big Mose dryly.

Mann took several drinks and enjoyed the feeling of confidence which they restored to him. He ate a big meal, topped it with another drink, and went into a rear room of the Silver King where he got a seat in a stud poker game. There he would stay. Allen's men had doubtless reported to him what the sheriff had said. Allen would know if he wanted him that he would have to look for him. Very well. Mann ordered another drink.

Mann played and won, lost and won, won and lost—imbibed freely, and let the world go hang. The lamps were lighted. He played on, eating sandwiches, drinking. Allen might come any time now. Well, let him come. If he had to, he would go through with the thing. But his slightly befogged brain had given birth to an idea. Probably Allen *didn't want* him to go through! It would be easier to leave him behind than to take him along and kill him. He startled the other players with a laugh and looked up just as the door opened.

In the open slit of doorway he saw the narrow, pinched face of the gunman, Squint. There was an imperative glance in the snapping eyes. He was wanted! A sober chill swept over him. He automatically sized up his stacks of checks and cashed in. The fire of those eyes sobered him.

Squint took him by the arm in the narrow passageway between the rooms, led him to the rear door. As they passed out, two men followed close. Squint pushed his charge headlong down the three steps and leaped to the ground. Two streaks of red fire spurted from his hip. Mann heard the sharp reports of the gun, saw two figures tumble down the steps. Then he ran for the trees behind the resort, with Squint Evans at his side.

As they plunged into the dark shadow of the cottonwoods and alders, the earth trembled beneath their feet and the heavens seemed to explode with all the thunder of the universe.

"They've blown up the Huntley and Yellowjacket powder houses!" cried Squint, as they stopped in their tracks. "I might have known it!" Then he prodded Mann in the back with his gun. "Run, you chicken-livered four-flusher, run! Set those fat legs of yours twinkling or I'll speed you up with bullets."

They weaved in and out among the trees and tents along the stream. From the street came a hoarse, roaring tumult of noise. Squint knew that the sounds of the two shots behind the Silver King would be forgotten in the excitement; but it didn't matter. He prodded Mann with the gun until the promoter dropped, puffing, blowing, and spent, upon the new bridge which had been completed the day before.

Squint caught the gleam of the moonlight on Joe's monocle before he saw him running across the bridge.

"Get him to the house," he yelled to Joe. "Hide him an' watch him. The sheriff's got to have him *alive!*"

Then Squint was off to town.

Silver City's celebration had reached its climax. Hundreds were in the street. "They've blown up the Huntley!" came the cry. "They've blown up the Yellowjacket tunnel!" another shouted. Then the milling mob concentrated in a mighty rush for the Yellowjacket road. Huntley and Yellowjacket men in even numbers were in the lead. Gamblers, prospectors, cowpunchers, tradespeople—they started up the road. Flaming pine torches appeared as if by magic, for Allen's lieutenants had done their work well. Men who had celebrated too strenuously fell by the roadside. A torch was flung into a pile of dry brush. Instantly, almost, the flames leaped angrily against the black shadow of the trees. More shouts. Men coming on the run down the road! The mob paused, wavered between the mounting flames and the rush of men coming down the road. The rush stopped. The light from the mounting flames glinted on the barrels of rifles and six-shooters. A volley went whistling over the heads of the mob. It broke and ran pell-mell down the road.

"Yellowjacket men back to fight the fire!" came Miller's roaring voice.

There was confusion as the Yellowjacket miners struggled out of the press of the crowd and started back up the road. They saw Hartland, Miller, Ross Milton, and a few others running down. All carried guns. "Stop that fire from eating up the hill," Miller shouted as they passed. They literally mowed their way through the mob.

In the street below, nearly deserted save for groups of frightened, excited women and girls, shots sounded. Men were running about the bank. Squint Evans was entering the upper end of the street, reloading the two empty chambers of his gun as he ran. The tall figure of Sheriff Currie showed in front of the bank. Red flame streaked from his gun to the accompaniment of shat-

tered glass and splintered wood as the bank doors gave way before his Yellowjacket deputies, smashing their way in with a battering-ram. A terrific explosion seemed to thrust out the whole front of the building. Men were thrown into the street. They rose to their knees and fired. Other shots—a fusillade!—came from the rear.

Then from around the corner of the bank came the wild, plunging figure of Butch Allen, hatless, blood streaming from his face, his eyes blazing, his face livid. He shot once at the men who were pushing into the bank, then darted up the street, keeping close to the buildings. Sheriff Currie saw him and started in pursuit. Squint Evans saw him just as he crossed toward the bank. He fired twice, but the range was too great. Then, he, too, ran after the gunman. But Squint was nearly winded. And Allen was faster on his feet than either of his pursuers. He gained.

Hartland, Miller, and the others came down the road into the street just behind Evans and the sheriff. They saw Butch Allen ahead and joined in the chase. The foremost of the mob behind followed, with stragglers bringing up the rear.

As they reached the bridge and crossed they came to a stop at the foot of the slope, looking up at the bungalow. In the light streaming from the open doorway was framed the slight figure of Monocle Joe, his single glass glistening. Behind him were John Cram and the frightened, twisted face of Fredericks. Butch Allen was stumbling toward the foot of the steps.

"Stop where you are or I'll drop you!" came Joe's high-pitched voice in sharp command.

For answer, Allen raised his gun.

Hartland started bounding up the slope before Miller could stop him.

"Turn around!"

It was not till then that the crowd, surging forward, saw the diminutive gunman, Squint Evans. The sheriff was some little distance behind him, having been outdistanced by Squint's final spurt.

Allen whirled. He appeared to see Hartland and Squint Evans at the same moment. He fired at Hartland and missed!—all in the twinkling of an eye. "Then *you* take it!" he cried hoarsely, whipping his gun on the leaping Squint.

Too late! Too slow! Evans had deliberately challenged Allen while his gun was still in its holster and Allen's was free! No one had seen him draw; no one remembered the flash at his hip as he had leaped. But Allen was staggering back, turning around, shooting aimlessly with the last strength left to him. He went down on the grass, tried to rise, sprawled his length with his face to the ground.

The crowd caught its breath and came up the slope in a surging wave. Sheriff Currie's tall, commanding figure confronted them. He held up a hand in a signal for silence.

"You Huntley men and others, go back to town. What happened tonight, as well as the projected walk-out, was engineered by this Allen and by Mann to make excitement and start you rampaging up the road while they and their gang looted the bank. They didn't get away with it. We've got Mann a prisoner, and he's going to talk. Go back to town and we'll have news for you in the morning."

Slowly the crowd melted away, started down the slope, and across the bridge. Sheriff Currie turned to Squint Evans.

"I reckon we're even, Squint," he said.

"I was thinking the same," was Evans' remark.

Then, with Hartland, Miller, and Milton, they went inside the house where Herbert Mann was cringing on the divan pleading for a drink.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CODE OF THE WEST.

SUNRISE found Silver City's main street thronged again. Crowds were in front of the wrecked bank, where the terrific blast had shattered the outer doors of the vault and virtually demolished the furnishings. Other crowds moved up and down in the dust of the street or gathered in front of the Consolidated offices.

The front office was locked, but there were several people in the rear room where a conference had been in progress for three hours. Roger Hartland and Sheriff Robert Currie were there; Miller and Ross Milton were there; Herbert Mann, white and shaking, helping himself at intervals to a stimulant, was present; and Alex Gordon, also shaken and nervous, was there.

Gordon had been found under the débris in the bank's private office, gagged and bound. He had been in the bank when the bandits had entered, overpowered the two watchmen, and tried to compel him to open the vault. He had told Allen point-blank that if the money in the vault was stolen the bank and himself would be ruined and he would have nothing to live for and he could shoot if he wished. Allen had seen the tired resignation in Gordon's eyes and had ordered him trussed up. They had been surprised to find him in the bank in the first place, and had come prepared to blow open the vault.

It was Squint Evans' guarded phone message to Sheriff Currie which had brought the official. He had recruited his special deputies from among the Yellowjacket men. Miller and Hartland were told, and a guard posted at the mines and secreted near the bank. The Huntley powder house had been blown up, but it was not known how it had been done or by whom. Squint had been unable to learn the hour set for the attempt upon the bank, although by clever spying he had learned that the bank vault was the objective. Sheriff Currie had ordered him to get Mann away and keep him safe. So far as they knew, every one of the Allen gang had been killed, wounded, or captured. Currie had lost two men. Five were wounded at the bank and two hurt fighting the fire near the road. The fire had been put out.

Both Hartland and Sheriff Currie felt a new respect for Alex Gordon, especially when the banker explained that he had got in so much cash because of the thrill it gave him to *see* it when he wanted to, and to know that his bank was so sound in this dawning era of prosperity. He told Hartland he had made up his mind to break with Mann and that he would have renewed John Cram's notes but was afraid it would make Mann suspicious. He confessed that he, too, had been overawed by Butch Allen—until it came to the point of parting with the money.

Allen possibly had suspected something when he heard Sheriff Currie was in town. One of the prisoners had confessed that his chief had been suspicious of Mann, and that they really hadn't intended to take the promoter with them or divide with him. When Allen realized the game was lost, he leaped to the conclusion that Mann had betrayed him. Then he had started for the one place where he thought they would have Mann a captive.

Mann had sat on the divan in Hartland's living room, and, between drinks, had told everything about the scheme, except that he didn't know about Allen's preparations to draw the crowds up the road. He tried to explain the fear that had prevented him from sending word somehow to Hartland, or telling the sheriff. Over and over again, he asserted that he had not intended to go through with the thing. He had intended to leave the card game and chance it on a run for

the woods at midnight, but it had grown late before he realized it. He had been drinking.

Sheriff Currie showed his disgust and merely said that he could "beat it out of the country when certain papers are signed." There was, after all. no direct evidence against him; for Butch Allen was dead.

Ross Milton took Mann to his room in the hotel soon after daybreak.

The others remained, discussing the affairs of the Consolidated. Already it was camp gossip that Hartland had received a favorable report from his mining experts and the spirits of those who had bought Consolidated stock were high despite the present muddle. The Huntley miners were angry with the knowledge that Allen had used them as mere tools. They would have mobbed, and possibly have tried to lynch Herbert Mann if the former promoter had not been kept under heavy guard.

At nine o'clock Hartland talked over the long-distance telephone to Butte. Shortly afterward, he and Sheriff Currie went into the front office and opened the outside door. They stepped out in front of the expectant crowd, which quieted immediately. Hartland looked a bit pale and worn, but some of his best friends in the East would have thought he looked bored. His voice was steady and clear and carried up and down the street as he addressed the throng.

"I have taken over the control of the Consolidated in conjunction with Frost & Ferris, of Butte," he announced. "The company will be reorganized and no further stock will be offered at present. Any who may wish to do so, may cash their certificates for cash at this office after noon to-day. Alex Gordon will be in charge."

Having spoken, he made his way through the crowd with the sheriff, who accompanied him up the street until the path was clear. Not until the sheriff left him and turned back did the big throng break loose. Hartland smiled faintly at the cheering.

As Hartland climbed the steps to his veranda a vision of loveliness was framed in the doorway. He took off his hat and managed a cheerful smile.

"You here, Margaret?" he said, noting the white apron over her pale-blue frock, her sparkling eyes, her rosy cheeks, and soft hair. "Getting breakfast?"

She put her arm through his, led him inside to the big divan. There they sat down and she looked at him steadily for a few moments. "Fredericks isn't feeling too well," she said, "so I'm officiating. I was here last night, but took care that you didn't see me. You look tired."

"Do I?" he said foolishly. Then he kissed her. "I *am* tired," he confessed, fondling her hands. "I wasn't cut out for this sort of thing, Margaret. I've made a coup, I suppose, by getting Frost & Ferris in and taking over the Consolidated. I'm the big man of the new-born camp, with the making of it in my hands. But I don't get the thrill I expected. It doesn't seem to mean much to me. Maybe I'm just a misfit when it comes to doing things."

Her arms crept about his neck. "But you're not a misfit," she said stoutly, her lips brushing his. "You *are* doing things. And you'll do bigger things. Look into my eyes, Roger, and see that I believe in you!"

He looked and held her closely. "Then, if you believe in me, you'll marry me because I'm the one man you want," he said softly.

"Yes, Roger," she whispered. "And I want you for yourself, sweetheart. Just for—*you*."

One week later, Hartland went into the high hills. With him were Monocle Joe and Fredericks. They had three pack horses in addition to their saddle

animals, and Joe was to act as wrangler and packer, while Fredericks was to officiate as cook, "an' *learn* something!" as Joe put it.

They went over the range and down into the Smith River country, and on into the Big Belt mountains, camping where sunset overtook them, fishing for trout and grayling, taking it easy. They turned northwest into the Rockies, went on to Swan Lake, up into Gordon Gulch, down the South Fork of the Flathead. July, August, and September slipped away. Hartland luxuriated in a new peace and happiness that was, nevertheless, suspicious and disquieting when he thought about it. He made friends with forest rangers, fire guards on lonely observation peaks, trappers, and hillsmen generally.

Meanwhile, Miller, with John Cram as chief assistant, was supervising the sinking of the Yellowjacket prospect shaft. The men had returned to the Huntley. Fred Crawford was pushing the work there, with Sandy Anderson as his foreman. The camp was flourishing. Then down went the diamond drills, and on a day late in October, Miller sent out a messenger to find Hartland, who was in the Big River country in the high Rockies.

The messenger reached Hartland a week later. Hartland tore open the envelope and unfolded the single sheet of paper. Then he read:

> Come back. We've got the copper.
>
> MILLER.

When, some ten days later, they rode into Silver City, they were given an ovation by a crowd that accompanied them to the bungalow. Hartland, somewhat dazed, permitted his hand to be grasped by scores. Gradually he grasped the information that "they've got it in the Yellowjacket." Frost & Ferris, who had taken charge of the reorganization of the Consolidated, had changed the company name to the Hartland Mines & Milling Company and the stock was soaring in price, with none to be had. Already it had been decided to change the name of the town to Copper City. The railroad people were waking up. The boom had become a fixture!

Miller came at last and Hartland met him on the porch.

"Is it true?" Hartland asked excitedly. "Have we got it?"

Miller swelled out his chest. "I always said," he began; "I always said that——"

"Shut up," said Hartland, grinning. "Joe, get my horse!"

A volunteer rider had dashed with the news to the Cram place and Margaret was waiting for Hartland in the little yard when he arrived and flung himself from the saddle. He stood above her, with his hands on her shoulders. She looked up at him—bronzed, clear-eyed—and saw something in his gaze that brought her heart into her throat.

"You—you stayed away so long, Roger," she said.

"So you would be *sure* when I came back," he answered. "Are you *sure*, Margaret?"

"Yes." He hardly heard her whisper.

Then he had her in his arms and she was clinging to him. He kissed her almost savagely. Then, "I guess I'm not a misfit," he said whimsically. "I got a big thrill out of the camp when I got back, and another from you. Margaret, by the gods of these everlasting hills, *I love you!*"

John Cram came riding in from town. Roger Hartland and Margaret did not see him until he was standing before them.

"What's this, what's this?" the old man blustered.

"We're getting married next week if Margaret says so," Hartland answered quickly.

"Indian summer is as good as June," Margaret said.

"I expect that makes it unanimous," said John Cram dryly. "Well, I've only known it was going to happen for something like five months!"

Roger Hartland and his wife were sitting in a comfortable chair before the fire in the bungalow. The scented dusk of Indian summer had long since given way to night. The wind was singing down the valley. Creeps Hallow's spirit, thought Hartland, and his arms held Margaret closer.

All Copper City had attended the wedding that noon. Sheriff Currie had been there, Ross Milton had been best man. Squint Evans, now a permanent fixture like Monocle Joe in the gaming rooms, had presented the bride with the first dozen genuine orchids ever seen in those hills. John Cram had given his daughter away. Five thousand men, women, and children of the town and from the lowlands had given their blessing. Now the two sat for the first time in front of their own fireside. Later, they were to go East and abroad. But always they were to come back.

Fredericks entered, inspected the lamp on the table, coughed slightly. Hartland looked up at him; his bride peered slyly over his shoulder.

It was a different Fredericks she saw. The face was tanned and had lost its flabbiness. Fredericks now could pack a horse as well as ride one. He could bake biscuits by the coals of a camp fire. He could even swear. But he hadn't forgotten that he was a gentleman's gentleman.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said with great dignity, "but could I ask for the night off, sir?"

Hartland smiled and looked at Margaret, who hid her face in his shoulder. She was laughing silently.

"What's the big idea?" Hartland asked, frowning fiercely.

"Joe wishes to take me downtown so I can learn—ah—stud poker, sir," said Fredericks, elevating his chin.

Hartland laughed outright. "Go to it," he said. "I hope you've got enough money, Fredericks, because that crowd'll pick you clean as a whistle."

"Very good, sir," said Fredericks, bowing.

Hartland gathered Margaret in his arms, as Fredericks left, and kissed her. "Joe believes in the code of the East," he chuckled; "get the money!"

But the sally recalled an unpleasant memory.

"What's the code of the West, Roger?"

"You'll have to tell me," he said.

"Be square," she answered. "We'll always be that with each other, won't we, Roger?"

"Yes," he said simply.

Fredericks and Monocle Joe looked back when they reached the bridge. They saw the yellow gleam of the lamp go out. Only the dull, flickering light of the fire showed in the windows of the bungalow. They went on into town.

THE END.

The Mourning Stars

By *Roland Krebs*

Author of "Something for Plenty," etc.

"WELL, well, well, well," drawled "Biffalo" Bull as he read snatches of news from the *County Advocate* to the boys lying around the R Bar R bunk house. "Vicksville's putting up another stop-go traffic light on Commercial Street. That makes three. It also makes me sick. You'd think it was a big town."

"It's a good thing," "Slim" Evers put in sarcastically. "Keeps the stray hens, and roosters, and dogs, and cats, in downtown Vicksville from running each other down crossing the streets. What else is new in Vicksville?"

"Mrs. Sidney Steigers announced the engagement of her daughter, Muriel, to Mr. Horace E. Springs, of Xenia, Ohio. Love must be blind. I been in Xenia—— The stork left a nine-pound boy at the home of Eddie Wells. The stork ought to get hisself a truck for deliveries at the Wells home. This youngster is Eddie's eleventh.

"Well, I'll be such-and-such! The Harvey & Hannigan Lumber Company has gone bust, and old Milton F. Sears has been appointed receiver in bankruptcy. That dirty old skinflint! The stockholders will be lucky if there's a few splinters laying around the yards when he gets through. And tight! Every time he takes a nickel out of his pocket the Indian goes blind on account of the sudden and unlooked-for change from darkness to light. That stingy old coot would sooner——"

"You don't seem to like 'Old Man' Sears," "Hungry" Hosford put in dryly.

"No, I don't, and so don't a lot of other people," Biff sputtered. "Why, if that fellow Benedict Arnold was living out here, old Sears would still be the most hated man in Montana."

"Anybody dead in Vicksville?" Bill Tell inquired sleepily.

Biffalo Bull, still mumbling about Old Man Sears, turned a page.

"Seems not," he said after a time, "although they've got a candidate. Seems a fellow named Victor J. East-

man was took down Friday with double pneumonia. The paper states he is not expected to live. Anybody here know him?"

"I believe I met him once when I was in Vicksville," Hungry Hosford said. "New fellow who moved here from the State of Washington, as I recall. Pretty decent chap, as I remember him. Looks like a job for 'Red' and 'Shorty,' hey?"

You might think from that last crack that Red Johns and Shorty Nolan were a brace of embalmers, but the truth is that they were the only members of the R Bar R outfit who were supposed to be able to sing—although I'm not sure who supposed it. Some time back they sang "Lead, Kindly Light" at somebody or other's funeral, and they were voted such a smash that now a guy can't die in our end of the State without having Red and Shorty tear a few songs to shreds at the grave.

I want to say for the two boys that they certainly were generous with their voices. It didn't make any difference who you happened to be, or whether Red and Shorty knew you or not. If you died, they'd be glad to push you on into the next world with a couple of blasts from their windpipes.

Even as we were talking about them probably being called on to sing something sad for this Mr. Eastman, whoever he was, if he should die—why, we heard them coming to the bunk house. Red and Shorty were singing "The Tattooed Lady." This ain't any graveside ditty. As the bunk-house door flew open, and they stepped in out of the night, Red and Shorty finished the song.

Grinning from ear to ear, neither of them looked like two fellows who had been the big hit of every funeral in this neighborhood for months.

But you ought to see the sad pans both of them can wear when they sing for the current dear departed. Red and Shorty can put a choke into their voice at just the right spot, whether they know the guy who's dead or not. They've got so good at it and were so popular that the R Bar R boys always called them "The Mourning Stars."

Red's got just a little edge on Shorty, because he can make a pretty decent speech.

I believe Red would have been a big shot with any tabloid newspaper. Just give him the name of a party that was dead and a few facts, and Red would compose a speech about the fellow that would practically have elected him mayor if he hadn't have died.

"Don't you think it's a little hypocritical," I once asked Red, "to be going through all these mourning capers and making these tender speeches about folks you hardly know?"

"Certainly not!" He certainly-noted me haughtily. "If I make the bereaved widow and others feel a little better by singing to them and speeching about what a swell bird the deceased was, have I hurt anybody? No! Have I done somebody a good turn? Well, I hope to remark!"

I don't know but what he was probably right. An undertaker always puts on a face like your sorrow was breaking his heart, and all along you know he's wondering whether you're going to pay him with a check or cash—or if you're going to pay him at all.

Well, anyway, on the evening in question, we told the two Twitter Twins that Mr. Eastman was expected to die.

"Who is he?" inquired Shorty.

"Nobody seems to know for sure," I said, "but it looks like he's past recovering."

"Gee, that's too bad!" Shorty remarked. "I bet he was a nice fellow. Most people who die were."

Well, sir, that copy of the *County Advocate* that Biffalo Bull had been reading had been printed two days

earlier. About nine thirty that p. m., the ranch-house party-wire phone rang, and it was Angus Sedgewick of Vicksville saying that Mr. Eastman had died and would Red and Shorty be so good as to peel off a number and a speech at the obsequies.

Red answered the telephone and said sure they would, and who was Mr. Eastman and a few more things about him so he could prepare a little speech that would goal the mourners. Angus Sedgewick offered to send an automobile over after Red and Shorty, but Red told him to never mind, because he was sure Slim Evers would let them use his flivver.

"This is too bad," Red remarked when he was back in the bunkery. "This fellow Eastman seems to have been a right guy all around."

It turned out that Mr. Eastman's no-account younger brother had absconded from the State of Washington with some lodge benefit funds, and Mr. Eastman had sold his house to make good for the honor of the family name. Not only that, but he had taken care of his brother's wife and the three kids said brother had deserted, in addition to taking care of his own wife and four youngsters. All in all, the gent had been a regular big-hearted Otis any way you looked at him, and he didn't have an enemy in the world.

"It ought to be a pipe to write a little obituary on this fellow," Red said as he sharpened a pencil. "Let's hear a few suggestions from you fellows as we go along."

It was close to midnight before we were all through suggesting, and Red was all through scribbling. Then he tried out this little speech on us:

"My friends, we are gathered here on this sad occasion to pay a last, but never an adequate, tribute to one whom we all loved, one whom we all respected, one whose generosity to his fellow man set an example which we all should strive to emulate—— Say, Al, how do you spell 'emulate'?"

"What do you care?" I reminded him. "You don't have to spell it at the funeral. Just speech it."

"That's right," Red agreed and went on: "We are here to say a mournful farewell to—uh—what's the fellow's name again?"

"George J. Eastman," Shorty Nolan told him.

"You're crazy," Biffalo put in, looking at the *Advocate*. "It's Victor J. Eastman. Go on, Red."

"Victor J. Eastman was a man," Red announced, reading from his notes, "who never was too busy to help the unfortunate whose plight was worse than his own. The man against whom luck had turned her back knew that he would find help and sanctuary if he went to George F. Eastman. George F. East——"

"It's Victor J., and not George F. Eastman," Biff interrupted.

"It's George J.," Shorty insisted.

"It's written in my notes here as George F.," Red argued.

Biffalo Bull dug up the *County Advocate* again and looked the name up once more. "Victor J., just like I said," he snapped at Shorty.

"What I'd better do to play safe," Red said, scratching at his memorandum with his pencil, "is just cut out the name and speak of 'he' and 'him.' It would be a awful break to be saying all these swell things about a party, acting like you and him were the greatest buddies and all, and then not know his name right."

"That's sensible," Biff told him.

"Gee, fellows," Red continued, reading as he went, "it ought to go over with a bang when I get to: 'Never a man to seek self-aggrandizement, George F.——' Here! That's one I forgot to cross out. I should say, 'he.' Anyway—'self aggrandizement, he became conspicuous by the inconspicu-

ous way in which he went among us, doing good at every turn. Mankind has lost a noble spirit in the untimely death of George F.——' Give me that pencil, Shorty. There! '—in the untimely death of our—uh—our—um—uh——' "

"Our companion, our benefactor, and our friend!" Shorty Nolan suggested with a burst of genius.

"That's swell!" Red complimented him, jotting it down. "Say, fellows, there's a lot of high-priced English floating around among us. That's a bang-up speech, if you ask me. I'm going to save it. Somebody that fits the speech may die in the future, and we can use it again."

All the next day Red rehearsed his spiel till he had it memorized perfectly. He rang in some nifty gestures, too, shaking his finger to drive home a point, lifting up his arms to make something else sound more solemn, and spreading out all his fingers and thumbs and pointing them backward till the tips rested on his chest. Some city lost a wonderful candidate for alderman when Red Johns turned cowpuncher.

On the morning of the day of the funeral, while Red and Shorty were getting slicked up, Slim Evers got his flivver into as good condition as anybody'll ever get that flivver, because it had a forty-mile trip out and a forty-mile trip back to make that afternoon.

Red and Shorty, singing "The Tattooed Lady," started out confidently at about a quarter of eleven.

Well, sir, that trip of theirs was just one left-handed break after another.

Slim's flivver never was famous for having put up good performances, but on this day it was particularly bad. Just before the two boys got into Vicksville, a petcock or something fell off the cooling system, and all the water ran out. She overheated, and they had to let it cool.

However, by the time the funeral procession was ready to leave the modest little Eastman home, the hack seemed to be all right again.

Yeah, it "seemed to be," but it wasn't.

"Just as we shoved off—us the last car in line—a rear tire blew out," Shorty told me that evening when they got back. "Me and Red, we got right to work on it and had it patched in about ten minutes, when we started to overtake the funeral party. I guess we must have put the tube back without letting the patch get dry enough, because we hadn't gone fifty feet before she blew again.

"When we got it fixed for good, the funeral outfit was out of sight. We were kind of stumped for a minute, because there's two roads, you know, that can take you out to them two cemeteries near Vicksville."

"And you took the wrong one?" I asked.

"No," Shorty said. "'Take the Big Bend Road,' I said to Red. 'If we don't overtake them all of a sudden—why, then they went over the Georgetown Road, and we can get onto the Georgetown Road by cutting over the East and West Road. We caught up with the string of machines, though, before we got to the East and West Road."

"And how did your stuff go over?" I inquired.

"Say! We knocked them dead!" Shorty bragged. "The silent reception they gave us would have made anybody think it was simply because they were all friends of ours, but they were all strangers. I didn't see a soul I knew when I glanced around.

"While Red and me went over big with our song, I got to hand it to Red, Al. He grabbed all the gravy with his speech—his valedictory. He left them with their mouths open. Every time he beared down on what a swell guy

the deceased had been—why, the widow hit the ceiling. It was a knock-out."

An hour or two later there was a call on the ranch-house phone from Angus Sedgewick. Figuring he just wanted to thank the boys and because neither was there at the moment, I volunteered to take the message.

"Say, Mr. Crews," he began, speaking kind of apologetically, "your friends, Red and Shorty, aren't sore at me, are they?"

"No. Why should they be?" I came back at him.

"On account of me asking them to lay off on the song and the speech they so kindly arranged for. You know, Mr. Crews, when I asked them to perform—uh—I should say—uh—when I asked them to officiate, I didn't know about that provision in Mr. Eastman's last will."

"What provision?" I inquired, all puzzled up.

"About him wanting to be buried quietly and—uh—unostentatiously, with no ceremony, and so on. I guess the undertaker explained that to Red and Shorty all O. K., didn't he? The undertaker said he'd nail them at the cemetery gate and make my apologies. I just wanted to apologize in person now."

"Why—they——" I stuttered.

"You see," Mr. Sedgewick went on, more apologetically than ever, "I didn't find out about this until I spoke to the widow after we left her home."

"Yeah, but Mr. Sedgewick," I said, "I'm afraid the boys didn't get your message, and probably they've gummed it all up. They sang, and Red made quite a speech. Shorty was telling me about it just a few minutes ago."

"Perhaps he was just putting you on," Angus argued, "because no one sang, and no one made any spiel. I was at the grave all along. Matter of fact, I didn't see either of them after the funeral procession left the Eastman home."

For a minute I was stumped. Then I asked: "Was there any other funeral this afternoon?"

"Yes—Old Man Sears," Mr. Sedgewick informed me.

"Old Man Sears!" I yelled. "When did he die? I didn't know he was sick, even."

"He died of heart disease on the same day that Mr. Eastman did," Angus explained. "I didn't think of mentioning it, Mr. Crews. I didn't know Mr. Sears was a friend of yours."

"He wasn't," I corrected him hastily. "Say, where was he buried?"

"In the Green Hill Cemetery."

"And where was Mr. Eastman buried?"

"In the Walnut Grove Cemetery."

"Did you go out there by the Big Bend Road or the Georgetown Road?" was my next question.

"Georgetown. Why?" Angus Sedgewick asked me.

Lucky for me our connection was broken right then, and I didn't have to explain.

Just then through the window I saw Red, and Shorty, and a bunch of the boys, and I called them all in.

"Did you say you went over the Big Bend Road and caught up with the funeral?" I asked Shorty.

"That's right," the runt said.

"That's wrong," I told him. "Did you sing and make your speech in the Walnut Grove Cemetery or the Green Hill Cemetery?"

"Green Hill," Shorty announced. "And, say, I want to tell you we knocked them for a——"

"You goofs were at the wrong funeral," I said—and, say, I want to tell you that I knocked *them* for a goal!

"Wrong funeral!" Red and Shorty yelped. "Whose?"

"Old Man Sears. He died of a heart stroke—all of a sudden."

"Must have found a hole in his pocket," Biffalo commented.

Red and Shorty fell backward into two chairs that luckily were standing right behind them.

"Gee!" Red exclaimed when he got his breath. "The Widow Eastman must be awfully sore at us, thinking we laid down."

"No, she's not," I assured him and explained about the will.

Red still looked dizzy. "Golly, I'm sorry!" he moaned. "The poor Widow Sears is probably sore at us, figuring we did it as a joke to razz her tightwad husband. It's a shame! Mrs. Sears is a fine old lady—generous as she could be with what she could pry loose from that old skinflint husband. What a pity!"

The phone rang just then at my elbow, and I answered.

"This is Mr. Espy, of the law firm of Espy, Dillman, & Wolf, of Vicksville," said the other end's voice. "May I speak to Mr. Johns?"

I put Red on and for several minutes Red said "Yes" and "No," and finally he busted out, smiling, with, "Well, well, you say! Hold the phone a minute, please."

He turned to us and for a minute stared, then smiled again. He held one mitt over the transmitter.

"This guy says the Widow Sears was so delighted with my tribute and our song in her husband's honor that she wants to know if she can't pay us two hundred and fifty dollars for our services."

"It's probably worth two hundred and fifty smacks to her to find out from all your blah about generosity that her husband must have been living a double life," Biffalo Bull put in. But that's just like Biff.

Red thought for a minute. "They tell me that that poor Mrs. Eastman is practically destitute," he said, talking to himself. Then, into the phone: "Yes, sir, we'll be glad to accept the check. . . . Make it payable to who? Make it payable to Mrs. George F. Eastman."

"Victor J.," Biff corrected again.

"Victor J., I should say. Thanks," Red finished and hung up.

"Fellows," Shorty Nolan announced, puffing out his chest, "I want to tell you that we knocked them mourners for a loop."

Don't try to tell me they didn't!

THE NOMADIC FISH

NOWADAYS, it seems that even the fish has developed nomadic tendencies and is inclined to roam far from his native waters. California sardines have recently been noted in Puget Sound, while Alaskan salmon have not been above inhabiting southern California waters, where such species have not been known before. These irregularities of nature noted along the Pacific coast and last year's freakish runs of salmon have led to investigations as to whether there has been a far-reaching change of the movement of fishes in the Pacific Ocean, resulting from a shift in currents or from some great change in marine conditions.

Aside from the strange movement of salmon and herring in Alaskan waters, a distinct rise in ocean temperature in northern districts is reported. Near San Pedro, a species of tuna hitherto unknown has become an important item in fisheries, while a few species of sunfish and yellow fins have been caught in Puget Sound waters for the first time.

"Saw Wood" and You'll Win!

by James Edward Hungerford

WHEN I first struck this lumber camp,
They made me push a saw,
Until I had the muscle cramp
From elbow clean to jaw.
I thought that I would surely drop
Right in my weary tracks,
But when I made as if to stop—
They handed me an ax!

I heaved that ax until I 'lowed
My sinews sure would crack,
And every lick I hit I vowed
Would surely break my back!
It took my every ounce of grit
To stick, and clamp my jaw,
And when I made as if to quit—
They gave me back the saw!

The drops ran down my flaming face,
And dripped upon the ground;
To quit would be a rank disgrace—
I vowed I'd not be downed!
I pushed that saw, and made it hum,
And forced a cheerful grin,
But my poor arms were fairly numb,
And I was sure all in!

And when I thought I'd ground my grist,
And earned a little rest,
With throbbing pains in either wrist,
And twinges in my chest;
The forest foreman kinda smiled,
Then got right down to tacks;
He said my dull saw must be filed—
And handed me the ax!

The months have passed since that first day,
Which I will ne'er forget,
And ever since I've drawn my pay—
And earned it, too, you bet!
I stuck it out, and went the route,
And now I am the champ
With ax and saw they brag about,
In this big lumber camp!

Just Punk

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Dog Stuff," etc.

"GWAN back home and stay there!"

Tim Brawley growled as he gave the order.

The half-grown husky pup eyed him brightly, as if to say, "I'm wise, Tim, old boy, your bark is worse than your bite. Right now you're kidding."

"Listen here, Punk, I'm not fooling. I mean it!" He picked up a chunk of ice and heaved it. "Now, beat it!"

The joy of living vanished from the pup's being. He crouched; his tail went between his legs, and, with a reproachful expression, he slunk into the brush.

Tim Brawley's step was light in spite of the fact that he was "necking." That is, he was dragging a light sled. The drag rope over his shoulder was gripped by a pair of powerful hands.

On the sled was a bale of silver-fox pelts worth five thousand dollars. On a steamer which at this moment was working its way up the Inside Passage was a girl who had decided to cast her lot with Tim for life.

"Dog-gone," Tim cried joyously, "if my legs last; and the railroad hangs together; and the ship don't sink, we'll be married and on our way home a week from to-day."

But there was one more thing he did not mention. When he thought of it, his face grew sterner and the smile vanished. "I'd almost forgotten Pete Strang," he muttered. "I guess I'd better clean up the slate so that when Jane arrives there'll be nothing to worry about."

Again his expression changed and grew soft. Sour-dough friends told him he was crazy to take a girl from "back East" and expect to make her happy in a log cabin fifty miles from the nearest town and twenty-eight miles from the nearest neighbor.

"You can't expect to make an Eastern girl like this country," they told him seriously; "she'll be scared stiff when——"

"Yes, she'll be scared stiff if some things happen that can happen. But most pioneer women came from the East originally. So did the men! But

I know the girl I'm marrying. She's the sort that may get scared, but she'll see it through. And, anyway, nothing's going to happen."

To which one of them had answered: "Nothing ever happens to deputy United States marshals in a new country. Oh, no! Nothing, except little incidents like gun play and sudden death."

Tim Brawley knew to whom they referred. Pete Strang was opposed to law and order for the simple reason that law and order hampered his style. Why shouldn't he trap animals if he needed their fur to exchange for grub? What if a species was wiped out of a district? Let the next generation worry about that! And so Pete trapped and told the law to go hang.

Twice he had been fined and given a jail sentence. But he had returned to his old stamping grounds, swearing he would shoot it out with the next officer sent to arrest him. The previous marshal was a family man. With a wife and seven children to look after no one blamed him for avoiding trouble if he could. To his credit it must be said that when a job needed attention he tackled it.

But when Pete returned from his last term in jail, the marshal was transferred, and Tim Brawley, twenty-four years old, six feet in his moccasins, and nearly two hundred pounds of muscle, bone, and hard flesh, was made deputy. The pay was nominal, as the deputy was not often called upon to act. Tim's real business was running a fox farm, stocked with choice silvers.

Suddenly he looked back. "That's funny," he muttered, "I swear I saw that pup slink into the brush. Oh, well, guess he's gone back again! He should have been drowned in the first place—the little bum! Never make a sled dog in a thousand years. Huh! That's the trouble with me, I'm too tender-hearted. With dog feed low and none too much to eat myself, think of me feeding that Punk!"

Toward night he stopped. To the left of the trail stood a clearing. The remains of a stone chimney protruded above the snow. A hundred yards away stood a cache. At one time a man had operated a small road house here, but it had caught fire and burned down. The cache remained in good condition. It stood on poles, several feet above the ground, to keep animals from raiding its contents. The boxlike structure was built of small logs and roofed.

Tim stowed his fur and outfit therein; stood the sled on end, and then struck off through the timber. No need of going clear down to Pete Strang's unless there was some evidence of his violating the law. Tim knew where that evidence could be found if it existed.

Following the course of a frozen stream for several miles, he eventually came to an ice-covered pond. Working his way slowly along the bank, his alert eyes presently found what he sought. He reached down and dragged in a chain. A dead beaver was in the trap. "Pete's at it again," he growled.

His face was flushed with anger. Men of Pete's character had cleaned out that creek years before. He, with others, had started a new colony two years ago and it had been thriving the previous fall. Now it appeared to have been almost trapped clean.

He skinned the animal; placed the trap and pelt in a washboard pack, and continued downstream. "Guess I'd better use a little strategy, here," Tim reflected. "Pete's got sense enough to know I'm not paying him a social call." He worked his way along a ridge until he was down wind from the cabin, then cautiously approached. This maneuver kept Pete's dogs from scenting him.

Tim waited with confidence for sev-

eral minutes, then when Pete went down to the creek for water, he slipped into the cabin. The place was filthy. The trapper had not washed the dishes in weeks. The air was heavy with the odor of drying pelts and cured salmon.

Presently Strang himself appeared. In one hand he carried a bucket of water. In the other, a hand ax, which he had used to chop a hole through the ice. The sides of the bucket had glazed already, such was the cold. Strang's beard was matted with dirt; his hands were unclean; the fingers were cracked, the nails split. But a glance informed Tim Brawley that Pete's gun was clean and in working order, and his hunting knife sharp and cared for. Things that counted with Pete Strang were in the best condition.

His eyes glittered; his lips bared in a snarl, disclosing yellow, broken teeth. "Brawley!" he exclaimed. Then like a flash he hurled the ax. Tim ducked his head and heard the swish as it missed his cheek and ear. It struck deep into the log behind him and remained there. The handle quivered a moment, then was still.

Tim Brawley was speaking. "I should have drilled you for that, Strang," he said evenly. "One more false move and you get it."

"You bet you should have drilled me for that!" the man snarled. "I'll live now to get you."

"Turn around! Keep your hands up or—you won't live to get me!"

Strang obeyed. Tim searched him and found the usual weapons. The trapper's conscience must be troubling him when he would not go even for water without being armed! "If you hadn't sneaked into my cabin you'd never have got me," he growled.

"That's why I sneaked in," Tim retorted, and snapped the handcuffs about his prisoner's wrists. "That'll do for now! Had anything to eat yet this evening? No! Well, I'll get something. But first I'm going to wash things up."

"Clean guy, eh?"

"No, just particular is all!"

"There's grub on that shelf. Hash made from——"

"Hash? Ouch! Declined with thanks. I'll get a meal, and all of it will come out of freshly opened cans!"

Later they ate in silence. And still later Pete Strang was chained to his own bunk while the deputy slept on the table—after he had scrubbed the table.

Around midnight Tim was awakened by an uproar among the dogs. Grabbing his gun, he rushed into the night. "Yipe! Yipe! Yipe!" From a jumble of dogs came a familiar figure.

"Punk!" Tim groaned. "How in heck did you get here? Tagging me all the time, I suppose! Well, you see what you got!"

The pup was bleeding from a shoulder slash where one of Pete's dogs had caught him. As Brawley carried him into the cabin, the pup looked at the man with eyes filled with doubt. "Don't worry," Brawley growled, "I won't send you back now. I can't, with you hurt this way. Why can't you stay at home and keep out of trouble?"

But when Tim slept he permitted the pup to snuggle close.

A breakfast off clean dishes came first the next day. Then Brawley harnessed Pete's dogs; loaded his evidence —much of which had been found within the cabin—onto the sled, and set off. Punk was riding on the sled in style. Pete was ahead, breaking trail. And he had to break trail and keep moving or be nipped by his lead dog which he had ruled through fear.

Swinging past the cache, Brawley picked up his own outfit, added that to the load, and headed for the railroad that ran from Seward on the Sea to Fairbanks.

At a small town which tourists regarded as the jumping-off place, Tim turned his prisoner over to the authorities, while an obliging conductor held the train. "Here's the evidence, Bart," Tim informed a fellow deputy; "eight fine beaver pelts and three traps that I found set. Say, you don't want a dog, do you?"

"Yes, a good one." The deputy eyed Punk doubtfully. "But not that thing. Take him down to Seward and give him to Mel Horner. He'll work him off on some tourist that wants to take a Northern sled dog back to the States with him. Too bad you didn't bring Strang in a week ago! The judge was here, then, holding court. He won't be back for thirty days."

"The longer Pete's in jail, the better!"

The crash of glass broke in harshly on the conversation. The speakers looked up. Pete was peering through the hole he had smashed. His face was contorted in its accustomed snarl. "Gettin' married, they tell me. Remember, every minute you're with that girl, that I'll make a widow out of her! Don't forget it for a minute." The sinister note in the threat caused even Bart to shudder. And Bart was an old-time man hunter.

"He's bad, Tim, bad clean through," warned Bart. "Watch out. He means that!" He looked hard at the distorted face, crossed by the bars, rimmed by the ragged edges of the broken pane. "He should go to the Federal pen and McNeil Island. Jail means nothing to him. Well, good-by, and good luck!"

"Good-by, Brawley!" It was Strang shouting a final threat. "And I'll live to put the fear of death in that girl of yours, too."

And that threat reached Tim Brawley's very soul. He tried to shake off the feeling of depression, but it persisted. He watched the country swing behind the train. What long, dreary miles it covered! It made a man proud of his country. Uncle Sam was digging into his jeans for this road, but in the end the North would repay manifold; as the territory had repaid its original price manifold. The purchase had been a wise one.

Tim stretched his legs at the frequent stops, and at Anchorage remained overnight. The steamer train left for Seward the following morning.

At Seward, Mel Horner was down to meet him. "Steamer in yet, Mel?" asked Tim.

"No! She's twenty-four hours late. Storm blowing in the gulf. But don't worry, that girl of yours will arrive safe. Come on down to the hotel, sit around the stove, and swap yarns with the boys. Hello, where'd you get the dog?"

"That's your dog, Mel. He's followed me all the way. He's one of old Fox's sons, but you'd never know it. Every father, I suppose, must have a child that doesn't turn out well, and this is Fox's. You remember my old lead dog, don't you?"

"Guess pretty near every man in the North knew Fox at his best. How is he? You had him pensioned, didn't you?"

"Yes. He died this winter. And this thing is his last son. Look him over. He's too long-backed for packing; his feet aren't right, and he hasn't shown signs of having a brain in his head. Unless taking advantage of my tender-hearted streak is an indication. Give him to some tourist next summer. Anybody that will love him enough to pay eleven bucks or so fare will be good to him. Come on, Punk, get into the car. This is an automobile. You've never seen one before."

"Punk, eh?" Mel chuckled. "He's well named. By the way, I hear you brought in Pete Strang. Too bad you didn't shoot him and bring in the remains! He's going to keep on being

onery until somebody's killed. Well, here we are!"

The fur buyer on the *Aleutian* whispered to Kelly, the purser: "There's only one girl aboard, but she's a wow. Fix it up for her to sit at my table, will you?"

"I've already fixed it up for her to sit at my table," Kelly answered, "but I'll make room for you, too. And, as you say, she's a wow."

"What's she going North for? This isn't the time of year when schoolteachers travel."

Twenty-four hours later the fur buyer had a terrible crush on Jane Ryan. True, she wore an engagement ring. But the buyer had heard of cases where girls were won almost at the altar.

"Women," said he, forty-eight hours later, "are ever a source of mystery to me. Here you are, Miss Ryan, young, beautiful, accomplished. You know nothing of the hardships of Northern life. You don't even know if you will react to the perils of your life with credit to yourself. Outside, your success will be certain. As a wife, you would be a credit to any man; an inspiration. And yet you are willing to waste yourself up here. Will you tell me why?"

"Yes. The answer is simple. I am in love."

"I suspected that. May I ask, who with?"

"A man I met on this same boat last summer. I was making the round trip. And, well, he was my ideal of what a Northern man should be. Big, strong, capable. A man a girl could lean on if need be——"

"Up here a girl can't lean on a man. It's a partnership in every sense of the word. At times, you'll have to be a man."

She had not thought of that. A sudden fear possessed her. For the first time she wondered if she would fit into this life. For the first time in her life she knew a lack of self-confidence. She did not resent her companion's bringing up the point. There was no thought of frightening her. He was merely curious. She heard herself saying: "And, really, I was quite thrilled. When we reached Seward, he asked me to marry him. I had known him only ten days, mind you. Of course I refused. And so he followed me right back to Seattle. I was in doubt there. Then he followed me home to the East and—well—here I am."

"What's his name?"

"Tim Brawley!"

"Tim Brawley!" The buyer almost leaped out of his seat.

"What's the matter? Isn't he——"

"Of course he is. He's the best man who ever pulled a moccasin off a frostbitten foot. You just go right up there, Jane Ryan, and lean on him all you want to!"

These words thrilled Jane. A girl delights in knowing that her choice is well thought of. And with the thrill came the conviction that her own task would be harder. "I'm untried," she said to herself, "and the country is growing so different!"

The land continued to grow different as the steamer moved northward. Snow was down to the water's edge. The trees groaned under the burden of its weight and there was a silence so tremendous one could almost hear it.

Then came the gulf. Not the smooth sea she had known the previous summer, but a seething mass of black water and smothering foam that swept at times over the bridge and drenched the funnels with spray.

She remained in her bunk for sixty hours. Then came the calm waters of Prince William Sound. Cordova, La Touche, Valdez—names that mean the North.

Seward!

Here the men wore heavy clothing. In the semidarkness all looked the same. But one of them was acting as if he contemplated swimming to the steamer. That was Tim Brawley. She had heard much more about Tim since her fellow passengers had learned she was to become his wife. He was now a god in her eyes and she was almost afraid of him. She cried a little over it. She had thought him an ordinary, nice young man when she boarded the *Aleutian*. But now—— "And I'm such a nobody!" she cried in protest.

Tim was looking up for her from the time the ship started to swing alongside the dock. Not once did he look down. "Jane!" he cried. His soul was in his face. What a rugged face it was!

The fur buyer noted Brawley's expression. But he saw something else. The half-grown dog at Tim's feet was regarding his master with the same worship. "We all have our idols," the buyer muttered. "Mine's been money, and I've missed a lot!"

It might have been indiscreet, but the buyer noticed the reverence with which the big man took the half-frightened girl into his arms. Tim perhaps sensed Jane's fear. "I know it's different," he said. "Last summer it was hot; there were millions of flowers blooming; you felt soft breezes and saw lazy clouds in the sky. You're seeing the rough side of it, Jane. The other will come again. You don't need to be afraid——"

He did not understand her fear. It was not of the country, but of her own qualifications.

"It takes courage to make this trip alone, Jane. And just for an ordinary man like me! I'm no prize, but I love you."

"No prize!" She spoke aloud. He did not realize what a prize men considered him.

"That dog bothering you? If he does, say so. He keeps tagging me around. Name's Punk."

"Punk? Why?"

"Because he's just that—punk! Well, here we are. Mel will see that your things come up. We'll be married in the morning. It's too gloomy now. There should be brightness for a bride. It'll have to be early on account of the train."

The *Aleutian's* passengers sent the finest chimes clock they could buy in Seward. The fur buyer sent something special. And most of them crowded into the church. In the midst of the ceremony, Punk got in. Tim poked him toward the door with his foot, but he did not take his eyes from the minister.

"Let him stay," Jane whispered—without taking her eyes from the minister.

Rice, shouts, congratulations. And not all from Tim's friends, either! Jane had made many friends coming North. The *Aleutian's* skipper had given the bride away. Mel Horner had acted as best man.

Now the train was moving. The town, with its smoking chimneys and snowy cleanness, slipped away. A snow-covered road flashed into sight and was gone. The mountains were so high and close one could not see their tops from the window.

Back at the station, Mel Horner was saying, "Where'd that pup go to? He was here a moment ago."

Tim pointed out to Jane places of interest along the way. Beyond that peak, he had prospected; beyond that range he had hunted; or beyond that mountain pass were beautiful lakes and rivers alive with trout. It was always "beyond," with him. Things close at hand did not appeal to him.

"Foxes are doing great," he said suddenly, as if realizing that this was

now important to her. "Sold five thousand dollars' worth of pelts this year. We'll clean up ten thousand next year. After that, if you don't like it here in the winters we can live outside, maybe."

She only answered herself. "I'm going to like it! Going to fit into it."

Later they gathered their things together and left the train. Jane watched it pull on toward Fairbanks. The last link between her old life and the new had been broken. Tim was having a tough time with five husky dogs, each of which wanted to go in a different direction and any one of which could give a man a tussle single-handed.

"A new team," he explained. "I picked them up in Anchorage on the way out. We haven't got acquainted yet. This big fellow is a good leader, they say. Well, for gosh sake! How'd you get here?"

Punk was standing there, regarding the proceedings with interest. To him there was no mystery about his presence. He had merely obeyed a consuming desire to be with the only man he cared for. Bringing it about was simply a matter of sneaking aboard the train at Seward and boldly hopping off when Brawley left.

"I'll leave him here," Tim announced, "tied up with a strong chain. This thing is getting my goat. I suppose if I died, went to heaven, and was fitted with wings, I'd look around and find Punk there, big as life."

"Faithfulness should be rewarded, don't you——" Jane stopped speaking as though an invisible hand had choked her. "Look! Tim! That—creature!"

Tim looked up. Pete Strang was leering at Jane from the jail window. "Did you tell her, Brawley, she'd be a widow soon?" he cried. "If you didn't, I'm telling her now."

There was a note in Strang's voice that chilled the girl. His eyes almost fascinated her. Brawley was measuring Pete, glance with glance. "Shut up, Strang! You're where you can't bother anybody." But he dragged the baggage, sled, grub, and dogs out of sight before he began loading.

"There are one or two things to remember about these Northern dogs, Jane," he said. "A sour-dough's wife should know them. Unless you know the dogs, keep 'em chained. The best of them get the wanderlust and go off, particularly if they scent a caribou along the trail. Usually they go back home. Dogs have a strange way of getting home from a new country. If they leave you flat, you're out of luck. Don't let 'em fight. They bite each other's leg joints and then they're worthless for sled work." Jane listened because she was eager to learn. She never dreamed how soon she would remember those words.

It was snowing when they left the railroad and headed for some place—beyond!

Bart, the deputy in charge of the little jail, made a final round before turning in. He noticed it was snowing and he hoped that Tim Brawley and his girl had made it to Lone Mountain safely. It was quite a stiff mush, but there was a shelter cabin there. He turned a flash light on Pete Strang, and Pete snarled and cursed him. He always did.

Then Bart turned in. Presently Pete crawled from his bunk. He dressed for the trail—parka and moccasins. The bars, already sawed, gave way at his touch. He pulled himself to the window ledge and looked out. It was a ten-foot drop to the ground, but a snowdrift would break his fall. Then let them attempt to take him—alive!

He leaped, regained his feet, and ran to the nearest cover. Then he did the thing least to be expected—entered the jail office and selected his weapons. A .30-30 rifle; .45-caliber automatic pistol,

and a belt of ammunition. He found matches; canned food; a sleeping bag, tarp, and a pack. In fact, everything a deputy might need if he were hurriedly ordered to take the trail.

Pete Strang grinned in the gloom of the office; then silently closing the door he stepped into the storm. There was no doubt, no hesitation in his manner. He headed straight for Lone Mountain.

He watched the shelter cabin at dawn. Smoke came from the stone chimney; the door opened, and Tim Brawley stepped out. He was singing. His was the voice of a man who is happy. He paused and looked at a half-grown dog. "Punk! You're the limit!" When Tim reëntered the cabin, Pete heard the girl's laughter.

The silent watcher laughed grimly. "Brawley's singing at his own funeral. The girl's laughing at death."

After they had left, Pete entered the cabin, warmed himself, and prepared a meal. There was a delicate perfume in the air—suggestive of the girl who had come from the outside. "And that same perfume will be in my cabin," he muttered. "I could have dropped him twice this morning, but it wasn't the time. Later—maybe this afternoon. I'll be near home then." He smoked, then slept for two hours.

"You'd better ride a little while, Jane!" Tim Brawley smiled down on his bride. "It's level along here and it won't make much difference to the dogs. I'll break trail and they'll follow me."

Vagrant snowflakes were flying One storm lay behind them; another was beginning.

He wrapped her in robes, pulled back her parka hood, kissed her, then with a laugh hurried ahead. The girl dozed a moment, then awakened with a start. A man had cried out as if struck a mortal blow; the echo of a rifle rolled along the mountains. The dogs had stopped, crouching in fear. "Tim!" she cried. "Oh—Tim!"

Brawley's knees were sagging slowly, as if his muscles were growing weaker. His hand groped and found the butt of his pistol. Jane saw him fire twice, then fall to his knees. With an effort, he kept from pitching forward. Again he fired. The fourth shot kicked up the snow twenty feet in front of him. There was no fifth. Tim Brawley had fallen forward on his own weapon. A shudder ran through his frame.

From the thicket just ahead came the man that had once made the girl scream. His eyes were blazing with hate. "I got him!" He spoke thickly. "I told 'em I'd get the next man that mixed up with my business. I got Brawley! The great Brawley. The mighty pistol expert of the North. Bah!" He glared down on the silent figure. Then he turned to the girl. "You're coming with me, and you'll bring your bride clothes. You're a widow and—and—what's the matter? I'm growing numb all over. Did he get me with that third shot. Did he——"

Strang thrust his hand beneath his parka and drew it forth. "Blood!" he cried. "That bullet must have killed the nerves. I didn't—feel—it!"

He pitched forward as Tim Brawley had done. His shoulders lifted in a mighty sigh, then collapsed.

It had all happened so quickly! The girl ran to Tim, bent over him; then turned and rushed for the dogs. They were getting ready to bolt. She remembered Tim's words. "Watch them, unless you know them. Keep 'em chained."

The team was strange. She secured them to a tree and ran to Tim again. Punk was sniffing and whining. Suddenly he turned his muzzle upward and howled. The others joined—the death howl of the wolf breed. Dogs know

when death comes. How? No one can answer, but they know. The cries floated down the valley and were echoed. The wind sighed drearily through a clump of leafless trees.

"Tim!" she cried. "Oh, Tim! The death howl. Oh—Heaven!" She turned Tim over. How heavy he was! A flake struck his face and melted. Life faded often as quickly as that flake had melted.

"Tim! Oh, Tim! The dogs are howling for Strang, aren't they? It was Strang who was killed. You can't be dead, Tim." Her eyes never left his face. They were strained, staring eyes, filled with horror. Perhaps it was only a dream from which she would awaken to see Tim in all his strength, running ahead of the team. But, no, there was the bloodstained snow and the creature that had promised Tim death! What a horrible ending for their journey!

She felt beneath Tim's parka. The heart was beating violently. Slowly his eyes opened. Their depths filled with a haze, then slowly cleared. "Jane! Don't let him get you! Punk! Darn that dog! Where is he? Punk—go—home! Jane—home—old Bill Baxter understands—wounds."

Home!

Where?

Somewhere beyond. There were blazes that an experienced trapper might find. But the chechahco would never find them. The trail was blown full of snow. "Which way?" she cried. "Merciful Heaven, show me which way!"

She recalled the fur buyer's words. "Sometimes the women of the North have to be men."

That is what Tim Brawley needed now. A girl of the North; not a helpless creature from "back East"! She unknotted the sled lashings and dumped her trunk into the snow. It was filled with her bridal things, pretty clothing that would delight her husband's eyes. Eyes that were now glazing. She hated the dainty, useless finery. She dragged Tim to the sled and wrapped him in robes. "Which way?" she cried. "Which way?"

"Dogs," he had said, "were queer." They could find their way home through a strange country. Grown dogs. Not a funny-looking pup without a brain in his head. She looked at the leader and his powerful teammates. The country was new to them. Home was hundreds of miles away. And minutes counted. Then an idea came to her!

She stamped her foot. "Punk," she cried, "go home!"

He looked up at her and wagged his tail. He would go, but not until she did. "I've only one chance," she cried, "and that chance must be the right one. Punk! You've got to do it. Mush! Mush! Punk." And still he stood his ground.

Ordinary methods would not do in this emergency. Perhaps an experienced girl would have located the blazes. Jane had to rely on the means within her limited experience.

Desperate, she called the half-grown dog to her. With several straps she fashioned a crude harness and placed him in the lead. "Now," she cried, "go home!"

A change swept through the dog. She could see it. He was frantic with delight. Here was a person who had done what no other human had done for him. She had harnessed him to a team! He was treated as all dogs of his kind were treated. His tail was over his back; his ears were erect; his eyes sparkled.

"Punk!" cried Jane. "Now, mush!"

Punk started with the instinctive lunge of the sled dog. The others hit the harness and broke the sled free. Into the storm they moved; the girl at the gee pole, the pup in the lead.

Hours passed and darkness came. The pup plodded onward, with a confidence the girl did not feel. She could not check up on him. Did he know, or was he merely wandering aimlessly about?

Frequently she stopped to look at Tim. The cold air had congealed the blood on his head. He was breathing faintly. If only he could open his eyes for a moment and give directions! She'd get there somehow.

Her legs seemed about to break off at the hips. She was not used to long periods on snowshoes. Back East she had used them for sport.

Punk stopped without warning. He looked fearfully ahead, turned aside, then, trembling, slowly advanced. It was as if he knew he should go forward, yet was afraid. The big dogs grew restless. One of them whined. What was she to do!

Could Tim Brawley have seen the pup's actions then he would have known that Punk was indeed his father's son. His was the finest courage, for he did that which he was afraid to do—did it because it was necessary.

Without warning, a gray shadow flashed across an open space. Then the girl knew. "Wolves!" she gasped. There was no skulking; no hesitation on the part of these creatures. They gathered, then came into the open with a rush. There were six of them. The pup turned his eyes to the girl in mute appeal. He wanted to go ahead, but the sight was too much. Yet he stood his ground, with bristling hair protecting that which was his.

Aroused by the blood scent, the pack was determined. She caught up the .30-.30 rifle. She had fired it once, the previous day. Resting it, she aimed at the leader—and missed. The wolves paused and she sent another bullet into the group. The leader leaped high and sprawled to the snow. The others came with a rush. It was easier now. The targets were closer. She got three more wolves. The last was sheer luck, for it was so close she was aiming too high. A chance leap had lifted him within range.

The dogs bolted, dragging the pup with them. And when he attempted to return to the girl, one of them slashed his side. He whimpered and leaped ahead. The remaining wolves cut across in an attempt to intercept the team. She fired and wounded the fifth. If only her luck would hold!

The team shot over a ridge. As she fired her last shot, a lone wolf bounded after the sled.

Jane clung to the gun and ran. It was snowing again; slowly but surely filling the precious sled marks that guided her. The terrible fact came home to her that she was losing this race. The crazed dogs were running wild, dragging their unconscious burden with them.

Ahead she saw a spot where the sled had skidded, but beyond that nothing but a smooth expanse of drifting snow. She listened for some sound. Silence! Silence, except for the beat of her heart in her ears and the gasping of her lungs. "Tested and found wanting!" she cried in anguish. She looked upward and sobbed. "Oh, Heaven, if anything happens to him, let me die!"

As long as a human being can stand when in peril, there is a desire to move. Because Jane could not scale the walls of the valley, she followed the course of a frozen stream. Presently she stopped on the brink of a cliff. In summer a beautiful waterfall spilled over this cliff. Below lay another valley, hidden in the snow. Her path was blocked. Even so, where did it lead to? To some place—beyond. Nameless rivers and nameless valleys were legion in this land. But this stream must go somewhere. She worked her

way down a steep bank and followed the frozen course.

The cold silence was broken by the bark of a fox. It was answered by another. Then a chorus of barks rose high and died away to a single yapping. "Foxes!" she cried, and her heart leaped. "Just ahead!"

Then, as if relenting, as if the North had completed the test and found her worthy, the curtain of swirling snow lifted. A faint light glowed ahead. She ran toward it and cried out. The door opened and framed in it stood a shaggy-looking man. His hair was long; his beard thick and black. His eyes glittered with suspicion. "A girl!" he cried, and ran forward.

He carried her to the warmth of the cabin and pulled off her parka. She was pretty, and this seemed to surprise him. "A chechahco," he muttered, "what's she——" He ran to a drawer and brought out a photograph. "Tim's girl. What's happened to Tim? He wouldn't let that girl get lost. She's been through—torture!"

He poured hot tea down her throat and at last she opened frightened eyes. "Don't be skeered, girl," he said. "I look like something the dogs dragged home, but I'm Bill Baxter. Are you —Jane?"

"Yes. Find Tim! He's out there, somewhere!" Bill Baxter knew it was an impossible job. His face was drawn as he waited for details. "If old Fox was only leading that team!" he thought again and again.

Briefly she related what had happened. "And I failed Tim when he needed me," she cried in anguish.

"He got Pete, eh? Good! And you stood off a pack of wolves! Black wolves?"

"They were black," she cried, and wondered.

"No man could have done better, Jane. Used your head and followed the watercourse, too." As he spoke, he was pulling on his parka and getting ready for the trail.

"Is there a chance?" she asked, and he knew she wanted an answer.

"A slim one! That pup's too young, and his mother was a mongrel. If it was old Fox now—— You see, Jane, if Tim rolled off the sled the team would go on. Old Fox would turn around and come back. He was a sticker. But Punk—— Keep the fire going! I'll come back when I find him."

She heard him mechanically. Her mind had conjured up a terrible picture. If Tim rolled off the sled, the team would go on! She could see the silent figure lying in the snow even now; the slinking advance of a wolf as it skulked from cover to cover, with eyes always on the unconscious man—an advance of suspicion and determination.

Baxter shook her roughly. "Don't think of that!" he harshly ordered, as if he could read her thoughts. "That might not happen. You killed the pack."

"One got away——"

He opened the door, then stopped. "Listen!" he said.

From the night came a strange, sobbing sound. "Dogs!" Baxter whispered. "Tired dogs, panting as they pull a load."

He ran out and Jane followed. With head lowered and tail dragging, came Punk. Behind him loomed the tired members of the new team. And on the sled, half conscious—lay Tim Brawley.

The warmth and light revived the wounded man. "Sweetheart," he whispered to Jane, "you brought me in."

"No. It was Punk——"

"Yes," Tim muttered dazedly, "I remember now. I fell off the sled; opened my eyes, and there was the little bum standing waiting. Fox used to do that. I got back onto the sled again

and passed out for a while. I'm sorry you had to go through—this!"

"Now that I know you're not badly hurt, I'm glad, Tim," said Jane stoutly. "I'm not afraid of myself now——"

"Nor anything else," Bill growled. "Six wolves—and she used her head!"

With tail and ears up, Punk sniffed about the cabin. He was nobody's fool. He knew exactly how he stood around this man's fox ranch.

A BATTLE IN NEVADA REPTILE LIFE

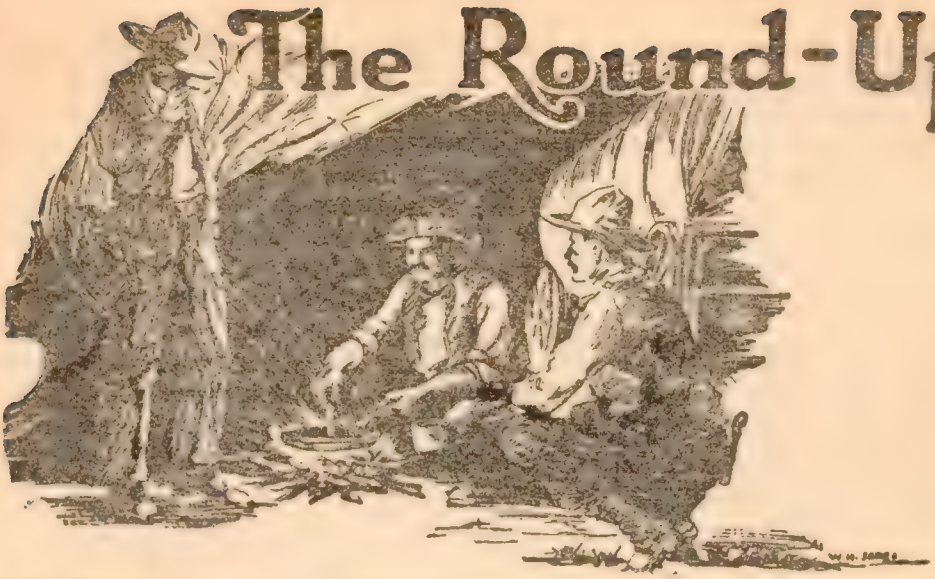
PROBABLY one of the best-versed authorities in the country on many of the phases of aboriginal life in the West is John T. Reid, a mining engineer and scientist of Lovelock, Nevada. Mr. Reid emphasizes the value of the lore possessed by older members of the Pah-Ute and Shoshone tribes inhabiting northern Nevada in maintaining records which accurately and fully depict the types and habits of Nevada's first settlers.

Recently Mr. Reid talked with Bow-E-An, whose immediate ancestors played an important and friendly part in the first affairs of white men in the Nevada territory. And from the aged Indian Mr. Reid gleaned a story of an encounter between a giant horned toad and a medium-sized rattlesnake that will be of great interest in the annals of wild life. Bow-E-An and five of his brothers witnessed the struggle while on a hunting trip some forty years ago.

The Indian gave the following graphic account of the incident: "We heard a big noise behind some boulders high, maybe, as my shoulder. Creeping up to the boulder, we peeked over it and saw a rattlesnake trying to strike a great, big, horned toad, puffed up with wind till he was much bigger than my fist.

"When the snake put out his fangs, the toad would run very fast and cross the snake's body, using his head and horns as he did so, just like a wild bull. Every time he struck the snake with his horns he cut it, and pretty soon the snake was all covered with its own blood. We went on hunting squirrels for about an hour, then came back. We found the rattlesnake dead, gashed in many places; and the toad was close by, not hurt at all. He seemed to be proud of what he had done. He had blown off the wind that made him look so big and was just a little bigger than the horned toads we were used to seeing as we hunted over the desert."

The Round-Up



FROM up Canada way—245 Dunn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario—there comes to us here to-night H. C. Hamilton. He wants to talk or write to two folks who have spoken here, though it was a long time ago that we heard their voices raised on a certain much-discussed subject:

"BOSS AND FOLKS OF THE ROUND-UP: Regarding the remarks made, some time ago, by two young ladies calling themselves 'Spanish Bit' and 'Miss Mexico,' I would like, if these remarks happen to be heard, directly or indirectly, by either, to have them come here and give their real names, also their addresses, or send them, as there are those, myself included, who would like to speak to them or drop them a line.

"I am not a horse trainer, but, nevertheless, I feel convinced that these ladies are not taking the best course. The world is gradually finding out that those relics of the dark ages—whips and spurs—can be largely, and in many cases wholly, dispensed with. But there are dark corners of the earth yet, where cruelty has its sway and depraved natures gratify their desires in causing pain to dumb creatures. And one of the most abhorrent spectacles a man can witness is a woman who is cruel to animals."

Hamilton, we hope your cry will raise an answer from the two ladies in question. No doubt they'll be glad to communicate with you.

But speakin' of handling 'em rough, coming to our rooms this afternoon after leavin' the office, we stopped in at a livery stable. Such places are gettin' scarce in this here big city of New York. But we couldn't fix it up to get down to our farm for the night, seein' as how we had this here date with you folks.

In this livery stable, we got to talkin' with a nice young feller who had charge of some show-performing ponies. The subject of breakin' came up, and we told him how we break our colts, slow, quiet, and gentlelike.

"That's fine, fine," says he "but, friend, we simply wouldn't have time to do it that way. It would take far, far too much time."

Remember it was jest the other night, here, that another feller said just about the same thing—allowed that, breakin' horses at five or ten dollars a head, you sure couldn't spend all summer at it,

so there was only one thing to do, go at 'em rough.

This lad who broke ponies to do tricks had the same tale to tell.

Well, all we've got to say is that we'd rather break fewer, and do it gentle. But then there's no accountin' for different tastes and inclinations, is there?

An old-timer, Mark Wheeler Sweet (Brown Bear), now on Route 3—Box 91—Memphis, Tennessee, says we know our stuff; and who knows better than Brown Bear if we do or not? Listen to this, hombres!

"Boss and Folks: I just dropped around to your fire to warm up a bit, and to chat with you of old times. I am an old-timer, both in reading your magazine, and in the ways of the old West. It does an old fellow good to read the stories of Max Brand, Charles H. Coe, Perkins, and, in fact, any of your story-tellers. It is hard for me to tell which I like best.

"Some thirty-five years ago, I went out West, from old New York State. I was just a boy, then—seventeen years of age. Arizona was only a Territory, and railroads were mighty scarce in that section of the country. Towns and cities were, also, very scarce, and very far apart. What few so-called cities, there were in the Territory were run 'wide open.' Shooting scrapes were of frequent occurrence around Prescott, Flagstaff, Globe, Ashforks, Tombstone, and the other towns.

"I was in the Southwest, and also the Northwest, for a good many years. I knew the cowboy and the old prospector, the professional gambler and the gunman, and soldiers, Chinese, and Mexicans. In fact, there were very few places in Arizona that I have not been in, and become acquainted with. I have seen and talked with 'The Apache Kid,' when he was a scout for Uncle Sam. Later I tried to catch him in San Carlos, after he went bad.

"I have ridden bucking horses, and I have slept under the stars, many nights. I have hunted deer below Apache, when it was ninety-six miles from a railroad, and have also killed the large, bronzed wild turkey in the same locality.

"No, Boss, when I tell you that Max Brand, and others of your writers, make me feel homesick when I read their stories, you and the rest of the Gang will have to agree that they must be very true to life. I pity the fellow who tries to criticize, when he does not know a thing about the country, or of the conditions of that day and time. I always come to the Round-up, and often I am very much amused at the ideas of some of the would-be critics. But a good many of the boys are all right—the ones that have been there.

"About guns. The old single-action, 45 Colt was my gun, and the Winchester .45-70 was the rifle I learned to depend on; and I was considered almost an expert with either. Of course, there were many other makes of guns, and many other kinds of men to use them. One man liked one kind, and another liked another make; and the most of them could hit the mark, and were mighty swift. The old Colt was the gun most used, however.

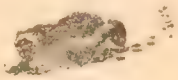
"I would like to chin with you all longer, but there are others to be heard, so I will close my trap for this time, just remainin' yours for things to remain as they are."

Frank Johnston, Ludlow, Pennsylvania, gives us praise, and for it we give him thanks.

"Boss: In my opinion, Western Story Magazine is the best of them all. I have read the magazine for three years, and I think that I will keep on reading it. It certainly is the 'Daddy of Them All.'

"'The Trail to Revenge,' written by Johnston McCulley, is a very good story. He certainly knows how to write good Western stories. 'The Gun Tamer,' by George Owen Baxter, is a very interesting and exciting, as well as a very enjoyable story. 'Bird Crazy,' by Ray Humphreys, was another good story. 'With Bared Fangs,' by Kenneth Gilbert, was all right, too. 'Tubby Saw Wood,' by Frank Richardson Pierce was an exciting story. 'Beaten Gold,' by Seth Ranger, was an enjoyable story, and 'The Indian Giver,' by Frank Triem, was also the kind I don't want to miss.

"I certainly do spend many happy hours reading the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. I think WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE is the best of all magazines, and I hope that it keeps on getting better and better, right along."



TRIALS AND JOYS OF THE PIONEER WOMAN

NOT long ago, the Wisconsin Federated Clubwomen held a contest for the best stories of pioneer women. Among the entries were inspiring tales of cheerful bravery in the face of constant hardship and danger.

When the pioneer man set out into an unknown wilderness with ax and gun, it was the pioneer wife who watched him go with anxious eyes, and who then turned to her thousand-and-one tasks of cooking, sewing, baking, working in the field, curing meat, making butter, candles, and shoes, and making the rough cabin livable with little material to work with.

Fear that her children would grow up like little savages led her, after a full day which had started at four in the morning, to gather her youngsters around her by candlelight at night, and go over their lessons with them. The first schools answered a heartfelt need and were gladly patronized.

There was always the dread of Indians in those early days. Especially at night, when the husband happened to be away, fearful fancies were apt to arise in the heart of the pioneer woman, while the wind shook the little cabin, and wolves howled near by. But her firm faith, as well as her sheer nerve and sense of humor, kept her from despair.

And there were good times, too. Parties were not elaborate in those days, but neighbors lived not so near, and were better friends. Everybody went to the parties; mothers carried their babies in their arms. Calico gown and sunbonnet was the acknowledged party costume.

Perhaps nothing expresses so well the unassuming, uncomplaining attitude of these women toward hardship as this excerpt from the story of Mrs. J. C. Phillips, of Chetek, Wisconsin:

"Well, after a time, Tom asked me to marry him, and I hastened to give him the desired answer. Then the boy asked me this unnecessary question, 'Miranda, are you really willing to cast your lot with me, perhaps in a strange and unopened part of our country?' I said: 'Tom Ward, do you think I am going to do one bit less than Ruth the Moabitess did? Anywhere you are willing to take me I will go.'" And she did.

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

AN old sour dough from Minersville! There is no old-timer who has not wanted to call a sour dough "pard." There is no gold rush without him—he is the dean of the prospectors; he is immortal, the sour dough!

The old sour dough from Minersville speaks to you-all.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am an old-timer—prospector and miner. I am what is known as an old sour dough. I have prospected and mined for a great many years of my life. I have also handled some cattle, and have spent many seasons as guard in the Klamath Forest in California.

Will answer all letters regarding forest service, mining, and prospecting for gold. Yes, and I'll tell you how to make the well-known sour-dough bread. It sure is a good diet for the hombre as likes to live out in the open. A sour dough, however, is more often rich in experience than in any other respect, and as I anticipate hundreds of inquiries, I'll have to limit my answers to the parties who inclose a self-addressed and stamped envelope. CHARLES A. MITCHEL.

Minersville, Trinity County, California.

Where the West begins.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live on a four-hundred-and-forty-acre ranch in the western part of sunny Colorado, where the West begins. I've lived on a ranch all my life, and am a great lover of horses. We had quite a herd of cattle at one time, and in those days it was a great life out in the hills.

Let's hear from all you lovers of live stock.

MARVIN WILEY.

Cedaredge, Colorado.

This is the time to roll your pack and trek, folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: About September first I'm going to roll a light pack and trek out of Los Angeles via the southern route. I'd like to hear from all you amigos along the trail who would care to say howdy, and perhaps swap a yarn or two with an itinerant compadre. Especially would I like to shake hands with those in the Arizona counties of Apache, Yavapai, Mojave, and Coconino. Likewise with those who live along the trail to Gallup, Albuquerque, Lincoln, Roswell, and down the Pecos to the Texas city of the same name.

This is my prospective route out of Pecos: Fort Worth, Dallas, Shreveport, Jackson, Anniston, Alabama; Atlanta; Columbia, South Carolina; Winston-Salem; Richmond; Washington, and New York City. Want to be in the big city in time to begin study in a trade school January first. That gives me three or four months on the trail, so I should be able to see a flock of the hombres who frequent the old Holla.

Now just a little word about myself. I'm

twenty-one, and in August I will have finished six years of service in the navy. Have been in Canada, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, the West Indies, Peru, Chile, Hawaiian Islands, China coast, up the Yangtze-Kiang Valley, and a few others. Even the mysterious Orient gets commonplace after too long out there. I'm looking forward to a great time in our own Western country.

W. A. BILLY ELAM.

Care of A. B. Sexton, Sebastopol, California.

California ranch country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Am a lonely hombre running a small eighty-acre ranch out here near Woodlake, California. Any one interested in this part of the country? Come right ahead, hombres. I can also interest folks who want to know about work in the harvest fields and about the logging camps. Have had experience in both.

If the wise old Owl is right, there should be a lot of folks who are interested in hearing about ranching and logging.

ROY BRADLEY.

Woodlake, California.

A rambler of this West of ours.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Any one wanting first-hand information about the West? I've rambled over this great Western land of ours for many years. In fact, my life has been lived in the West, and I know the country about as well as I know myself, which is a good deal, folks.

I notice that a lot of folks are interested in the Arizona country. Maybe I can add a few facts that will be acceptable. Arizona near the border is a whole world in itself. Yep, I can tell you about it.

There are a number of things, however, that I'd like to have you folks tell me. I'm hankering to do some rambling outside of the States. I'd like some of you hombres to put me next to seeing South America, Australia, and the South Sea Islands. I want to make the trip with as little expense as possible. Isn't it possible for a hombre to work his passage to most of these ports? How would one go about it?

Come a-running, folks. I'll sure meet you halfway. JUAN.

Care of The Tree.

This hombre is starting for South America in October.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm coming to the old Holla to find out what kind of an outfit I'd best take along on a trip to South America. I intend starting the middle of October.

I'm giving myself plenty of time to pack my kit, folks, and plenty of time to think over your advice. CLAUD DAVIS.

Care of Fred Stephenson, Route 5, Dunlap, Iowa.

Ramblers or stay-on-the-ranch folks—all are entitled to friends. A friendship-maker badge is waiting here for you.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

Webfoot comes to the Tree.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've traveled over most of the Western States from Canada to Mexico. I've tried my hand at almost everything, and I want to put in my say that I find logging the best of all. So if any of the Gang want to know about logging in Washington, Oregon, or California, I'll give them all the information they can use. Folks, give a webfoot a try! IVAN R. CHASE.

463 East Couch Street, Portland, Oregon.

A trip through Old Mexico.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Am an ex-soldier and am planning a trip through Old Mexico this summer. I'd appreciate hearing from any one living in any part of Mexico or any one who has made a trip through there.

This is Fitzsimons, Colorado, folks.

ARTHUR HASH.

Box 251, Fitzsimons, Colorado.

"The great, world-wide-known 101 Ranch is at Ponca City, Oklahoma. Although I'm only seventeen, I can tell most anything about this magnificent State of mine," says Anna Adair, Box 83, Durant, Oklahoma.

Kansan wants a pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've seen considerable of the good old United States, and parts of

Europe. Now I'm aiming to see more of the States, and am looking for a pard about my own age, which is thirty-two. We'll work our way as we go, and so my buddy must be of the hardy variety, and not be afraid to take the bad break if it's handed to us. Will answer all letters, pards.

GEORGE L. THOMAS.

Box 204-A, R. R. 1, Merriam, Kansas.

Trapper is looking for a pard to start a fur farm.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm thirty-one, a Canadian, and have been a trapper all my life. Just now I'm looking for a partner to start a fur farm with me. I have some very likely places in mind for that kind of a ranch. Any one who likes the outdoor life just get in touch with me, muy pronto.

TED MAVIS.

3209 Lyndale Avenue, South, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

"All you forest rangers around Yellowstone National, Mesa Verde, Mount McKinley, and Sequoia, let me hear from you," says Henry Spalding, Neches, Texas. This Gangster would like to join the army of rangers. Give him a helping hand, hombres.

Neal Hall, Burkburnett, Texas, can tell you about some of the ranches around in his section of the Lone Star State. The Triangle is one of them.

"I'd like to find several friends who'd be willing to take a chance on going to South or Central America," says T. W. Hansen, care of The Tree. This Gangster would like to combine prospecting with an adventure trip.

The San Joaquin Valley.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: They call the San Joaquin a great valley because of its size, and I guess that it's one of the "growingest" parts of the world. The Sierras—just a purple smudge—are to the east, and the coast range is just a line of blue in the west. There are, of course, many ranches here, but I can't tell very much about them, unfortunately, for I've always lived in Stockton.

There's much of interest to tell about Stockton and Lodi, however. Here's hoping you-all will send the postman my way.

JEAN PEARCH.

121 West Fremont Street, Stockton, California.

From Amarillo, Texas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My pal and I are planning a trip by car from Amarillo, Texas, to the coast of California. We want to find three or four other girls who would like to go with us. We've traveled quite a lot in the last year, and certainly enjoy it. We'll all share alike in the expenses, and we'll do our own driving, cooking, and sleep out whenever possible. Or we'll stop at tourist camps. Just whatever the crowd wants to do. We'd prefer girls from eighteen to twenty-two, for I'm eighteen and my pal is twenty-two. Write to us, pronto, if you're interested.

RAMBLERS.

Care of The Tree.

"My home is Oroville, a town in the Sierra Nevada foothills," says Alice Wemmer, Route B., Oroville, California. This Gangster is of high-school age. She can tell a great deal about the outdoor life in the Sierras.

Oklahoma miss.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Although I was born in California, eighteen years ago, and have the blue blood of old Kentucky flowing through my veins, I call myself an Oklahoman, for I've loved every minute of the nine years spent in this part of the country.

Jesse James used to have a cave about four miles from here—Sand Springs, and I never tire of telling the Indian legends and stories that are a part of this Oklahoma country. Oklahoma is one of the youngest States in the Union, and was the promised land of the Indians not so many years ago.

MISS OKLAHOMA.

Care of The Tree.

Hunting in Floyd County.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is Ralls, Texas, but I nearly always go over into Floyd County for my hunting and fishing. I have a small dairy farm with a few horses and mules. This is a great country if one likes to trap, hunt, and enjoy nature.

G. L. WILLIS.

Ralls, Texas.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

by John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

IF my memory isn't playing any tricks on me, I seem to recollect a promise made last week to continue this discussion of available land on Uncle Sam's irrigation projects. This is a mighty lively topic with us Westerners, for with our turn for pioneering we are always on the lookout for new territory. T. B. C., of St. Paul, Minnesota, evidently has an eye for new trails. At any rate, he is putting some plumb timely queries, the answers to which, I'm sure, all you prospective settlers will be mighty glad to listen in on.

"I'm interested in the Riverton Irrigation Project out in Wyoming, Mr. North. As this is one of the newer projects, I think it offers exceptional opportunities to the farmer. Will you tell me just where it is located and how to get there? What towns are on the project? What size farms are open to entry? How much public land is there on this project? What about private land, and how does it sell? What are the chief crops? Would there be any chance for a settler to find employment in the vicinity of his homestead? I have a small son, so I'm, naturally, interested in schools. And as I'm fond of hunting, I would like to know what the opportunities are for this sport?"

We'll say that in addition to having a pioneer's eyes for new trails, T. B. C. also has a lively curiosity and is not bashful at putting questions. However, that is the best way to find out things, and as it gives us a chance to air our information, we aren't complaining any. The Riverton Project is located in Fremont County, Wyoming, on land that was formerly a part of the Wind River Indian Reservation. If T. B. C. will look at a map of Wyoming, he'll see that this project lies near the center of the Wind River Basin. It is nine to thirty miles north and northwest of Riverton, a modern town of

fifteen hundred population, and the nearest railroad point.

About twenty-five miles from Riverton in the northwest part of the project is the small town of Pavillion. This village has electric lights and a supply of excellent water. The settler will find that he can buy all sorts of staple supplies there, and that his mail will arrive daily.

How to get there? Well, you may reach Riverton directly by train on the Chicago & North Western Railway, or by the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad to Bonneville, Wyoming; thence by regular automobile stage, a distance of about three miles, to Shoshone, and from this point to Riverton by the Chicago & North Western Railway. The stages connect with the Chicago & North Western Railway at Shoshone and with the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad at Bonneville.

If the home seeker wants to pack his belongings into the old flivver and camp gypsy fashion on the way, he will find excellent roads during the summer and fall. The Riverton Project, the Yellowstone National Park, and the Shoshone Project can all be included in one trip. This may be managed by going through the Shoshone Project, thence to Cody, and entering the Yellowstone National Park at its east entrance. The park may be left from the south entrance, passing Jackson Lake and the Teton Mountains on the way to Riverton, joining the main highway again at Shoshone.

I reckon T. B. C. knows that the water for the Riverton Project is diverted from Wind River by a concrete diversion dam, about thirty-five miles above Riverton, into the Wyoming Canal, which has a capacity of twenty-two hundred second-feet. The Pilot Butte Reservoir, with a capacity of thirty thousand acre-feet, supplies additional water.

The first unit of public land was opened to entry for settlers in the spring of 1926. This consisted of twenty farms of government land on the Pavillion Division. The irrigable area of these farms varies from thirty-five to one hundred and eight acres. The gross area varies from forty to one hundred and sixty acres. In the fall of 1926, an additional forty farms were thrown open on the same division, these farm units ranging in size from an irrigable area of twenty-five acres up to one hundred and twelve acres, and the gross area varying from eighty to one hundred and sixty acres. Additional public land is opened from time to time as settlers require it.

About seventy per cent of the Riverton Project is public land. The rest is privately owned, but very little of it is developed. If T. B. C. would prefer to buy land already patented, he will find private land for sale at from ten to twenty-five dollars an acre, depending on the location and quality of the land and the desire of the owner to sell.

As for crops, the soil and the climate of this part of Wyoming are adapted for the production of alfalfa, sweet clover, hard and soft wheat, oats, barley, corn, beans, seed peas, potatoes, sugar beets, garden vegetables, small fruits, and melons. Nor is this just speculation. These crops have been grown successfully under similar conditions on the older neighboring irrigation systems, such as in the Riverton Valley, and by very successful gardens at Pavillion and Wind River diversion dam. Settlers are advised, however, not to raise sugar beets on the Riverton Project until there are better railroad facilities. Later, beets will probably be one of the chief crops.

An excellent range surrounds the Riverton Project on three sides, giving the settler an opportunity to run large numbers of cattle and sheep. The old-

timers out that way say that the systematic feeding of ewes, lambs, and baby beef, if properly handled over a period of years, is always successful. As Wyoming does not as yet supply enough dairy products for her own needs, this is an open field. With irrigated pasture and plenty of home-grown forage, an excellent opportunity for dairying exists. There is a well-equipped creamery at Riverton which offers a cash market for all cream produced and will pay transportation charges on such cream if it is sent by stage.

The problem of finding employment in the vicinity of his homestead is always a hard one for the new settler. However, the Maverick Springs oil field is only twenty-five miles northwest of the project, and as this has proved production second in Wyoming only to the famous Salt Creek field, it would seem to offer possibilities. There are also several other good oil prospects within thirty miles. When these are developed, they will open up chances for off-season work to the settler as well as an additional market for his farm products.

A modern schoolhouse has recently been completed at Pavilion. This town also has a church. If T. B. C. is handy with the shooting irons and the fishing rod, he will find some of the best big-game hunting and fishing in the United States from fifteen to one hundred miles from the Riverton Project. In fact, the surrounding mountains offer unbounded facilities for outdoor sports, while the National Yellowstone Park and the Teton Mountains are within a day's automobile travel.

If any of you hombres would like more information on irrigation projects, just let me know, and it will be forthcoming.

THE SONG OF AN ESKIMO SWAIN

SOME of the more popular of the Alaskan Indian love songs have recently been recorded for the first time by members of the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. And in preserving some of these folk tunes of the North, men have discovered interesting as well as quaint aspects of Eskimo civilization. North of the Arctic Circle, for instance, it is customary for a lovesick swain to salute the maiden of his dreams with a ballad entitled "My Girl Is Like a Fish."

To us the comparison may seem a trifle unromantic. But it is not so to the Eskimo. John Fredson, an Alaskan Indian, has explained the charm of the song for his brethren in these words: "The Alaskan Indian youth who sang that song found it impossible to compare the charm of his sweetheart with anything that he knew until he recalled the beauty of the varicolored fish that inhabit near-by waters. The girl, of course, recognized the unusual compliment and felt the warmth of her admirer's love for her."

Fredson, while visiting at the Cincinnati home of a former missionary in Alaska, was persuaded to play the unrecorded Indian folk tunes on his violin, or to sing them to the accompaniment of rhythmic tappings of his bow in simulation of drum beats.

Fredson wrote a description of each of the songs, none of which contains words, since each singer makes up his own words to suit his own particular feelings and the occasion. Names of the tunes include "Down the Yukon," "Aurora Borealis," and "Don't Leave Me," as they were translated by Fredson, who is a student in a Southern university.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any changes in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

CHURCH, MRS. MAUDE.—Last heard from in Addison, New York. Information appreciated by an old friend, M. E. Rayburn, Carrier's Mills, Illinois.

BERTIET or MUCKMASTER, MRS. ASLEE, nee **LILES.**—About forty-seven years old. Born in Arkansas. Last heard from in Texas, fifteen years ago. Had three children. Information appreciated by her nephew, Rufus Liles, 815 Fifty-fourth Street, Marshfield, Oregon.

FAIMON, OTTO.—Thirty-five years old. Last heard from in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1925. Information appreciated by his mother, who is now alone, Mrs. J. Faimon, 515 Omaha Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.

O'CONNOR, HAZEL IRENE.—My mother. I was adopted in January, 1900, and lived in Detroit, Michigan. My foster parents are both dead. Information concerning my real mother appreciated by Mabel Bondy Wilson, Route 5, Eaton Rapids, Michigan.

BOYD, EVELYN.—Last heard from in California. We miss you. Please write to your cousin, Annie Bell Kelcy, Box 155, Mullin, Texas.

RUNGE, ZANO ELISABETH GUDRUN.—Twenty-seven years old. Born in Denmark. Last heard from in New York City, in May, 1926. Please write to P. R., care of this magazine.

HOLLAND, F. N.—Please let me know where you are. I love you. Your Sunshine, Mrs. Ida O. Weaver, General Delivery, Long Beach, California.

RYAN, ROSE.—Last heard from, in 1911, when she was in a hospital in St. Paul. Information appreciated by a relative, Nix, care of this magazine.

HANOVER, ROBERT.—Please write to L. 15, Apartment 11, Tenth Street, Sacramento, California.

JOHNSON, ELMER.—Last heard from at 335 Ludlow Street, Cincinnati, Ohio. Was at one time a coal miner in West Virginia. Information appreciated by Helen Steward, 608 Richmond Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

GRINER or **DRINER, JOHN.**—Formerly of Knoxville, Tennessee. Last heard from when in the army at Greenville, South Carolina, in 1918. Please write to Helen Steward, 608 Richmond Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

MacDONALD, KENNETH.—Left Stellarlon, Nova Scotia, over twenty years ago. Believed to be in the United States. Information appreciated by his brother, William MacDonald, 3 Gardener Street, Newton, Massachusetts.

HYLE, CLIFF, ESTHER, and daughter **EMOGENE.**—Last heard from near Fort Towson, Oklahoma, in August, 1927. Information appreciated by Mrs. Matilda Abner, Mauldin, Arkansas.

CAIGER, JOHN, or **ANDREW McCORMICK.**—Lived in the Sequatchie Valley, Tennessee, previous to the Civil War. Information concerning their descendants appreciated by Burel James, R. R. 1, Spark's Hill, Illinois.

HANSEN, CHRISTIAN and **SARA.**—Last heard from when living at 273 Forty-eighth Street, Brooklyn, New York. Believed to have moved to Bergen Beach. Please write to your old friend, Hulda Essex, 1431 Kentilworth Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

BROWN, FLOYD and **ETHEL.**—Last heard from in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1918. Floyd was a United States marine and Ethel came from Kittery, Maine. Please write to your friend, Hulda Essex, 1431 Kentilworth Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

GAUGER, MRS.—My mother's sister. Last heard from when she lived in Rockford, Iowa, in 1897. Information concerning her or any of my relatives appreciated by Mrs. Emma Treptow Kirkham, 812 Haskell Avenue, Rockford, Illinois.

DAVIS, EVERLY M.—Our baby is well. Please come back. All will be forgiven if you will give up your bad habits. Remember our happy days together. S. M. L., 12 West Street, Phoenix, Arizona.

HAND, ALICE.—Please write to the one that left you at the train in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on July 19, 1925. I still care and think of you. H. H. M., care of this magazine.

MacKAY, ALLEN P.—Last heard from in Oregon, in 1924. First two fingers on left hand missing. A World War veteran. Information appreciated by Little One, care of this magazine.

BOAZMAN, JACK C.—Six feet tall. Has a Southern accent. Deep-red rose on one arm. Forget the trouble in Detroit and think of the happy days in Cleveland. Your promise means everything to me. I need you. Have important news. Please write to Neva, 14560 Burgess Street, Brightmoor, Detroit, Michigan.

CANTRELL, ODIS.—My brother, who was placed in Iola, Kansas, Orphan's Home, together with his two brothers. We were all adopted and have lost track of each other. My name was Marian Cantrell and I was adopted by John Watson. Would like to hear from my real father and brothers. Maurice Watson, 1800 River Street, Waco, Texas.

WALKER, WAYNE DAEL.—Please let me hear from you. Margaret, care of this magazine.

SHAMOOCHIAN, MARTIN.—A tailor. Last heard from in Newton Highlands, Massachusetts, en route for San Diego, California, to buy a silkworm farm. Information appreciated by E. M. L., care of this magazine.

SCOVIL, JARVIS H. and **MARIA.**—Lived at 216 Farquer Street, Chicago, Illinois, in 1878. Would like to hear from any of their descendants. B. M. Fuller, Route 78, Jamestown, New York.

D. T. H.—We know and forgive everything. Your job is waiting for you. Your father is very ill and longs for you as well as your little girl and your wife. I love you and want you. Please come home. M. A. H., care of this magazine.

HAMLIN, CLAUD.—Formerly of Vallejo, California. Was in the army and stationed at Camp Greenleaf, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, in 1918. Last heard from in 1919, in St. Louis, Missouri. Please write to R. O., Box 663, Redwood City, California.

SCOTT, JOHN M.—Last heard from when he was traveling with "Scotts' Dramatic Troupe" in Texas. Information appreciated by his niece, Mrs. Myrtle Cage, Box 194, Glendale, Arizona.

GOODMAN, MRS. LULU M., nee **COIN.**—Her husband died in 1918. Last heard from in Joplin, Missouri. Please write to your old friend, Myrtle E. Cage, Box 194, Glendale, Arizona.

JACK.—Am very ill and want to hear from you. Kavalice, care of this magazine.

SHERLOCK, McNALLY, or **GILE, OLLIE.**—Twenty-three years old. A blonde from Kentucky. Believed to be in Illinois. Has a son named Virgil. Information appreciated by David C. Gile, 152 South Burdick Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

PHELPS, T. V.—I need you and want you. Honey.

KING, TED.—Twenty-three years old. Last heard from in Long Branch, New Jersey, in June, 1927. Please write to West, care of this magazine.

NELSON, JAMES HOPE.—Forty-nine years old. Born in Oak Hill, Kansas. Last heard from in Butte, Montana, in 1918. Brother and sister anxious to hear from you. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Elmer Ward, 1085 Natoma Street, San Francisco, California.

WEBB, GERTRUDE.—Formerly from Missouri. Last heard from in Big Lake, Texas. Please write to Wayne Robertson, Truscott, Texas.

MATTSON, WALTER.—Information appreciated by his sister, Edna W. Mattson, 23½ Union Avenue, Portland, Oregon.

BERNDT, AUGUST.—Last heard from at Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Your son, who was adopted by a farmer at Portage, Wisconsin, would like to hear from you. W. B. Blank, R. F. D. 1, Blue Island, Illinois.

ADAMS, JACQUES.—Last heard from in Heuringhem, Pas de Calais, France, in 1919, when he was a sergeant with the Red Cross. Information appreciated by Jackie, Marie Obeline Dermingham, 400 Highland Drive, Route 3, Bakersfield, California.

SELSTEDT, OLAF NICHOLAS.—Born in Sweden fifty years ago. Last heard from in 1902, when he owned a coffee plantation in the Hawaiian Islands. Believed to have gone to Alaska, in 1903, during the gold rush. Information appreciated by his niece, Mrs. Julia Sjognen, 152 Beaver Street, Hyde Park, Boston, Massachusetts.

MAPLE, NELSON.—Formerly of Topeka, Kansas. Last heard from two years ago, in Howard, Kansas. A musician. Information appreciated by I. W., care of this magazine.

KELLY, RAYMOND.—Formerly of Hollywood, California. Last heard from in Pueblo, Colorado. Has a daughter seven years old who is in the movies. Information appreciated by Columbine, care of this magazine.

DAVIS, EDWARD HOWARD.—Born about seventy-four years ago in Metamora, Michigan. Last heard from twenty-one years ago in San Martin, California, where he was employed by the Foos Gas Engine Co. Had a brother, Hope, who was a telegraph operator, and two children in Michigan. Information appreciated by Lorrie, care of this magazine.

SACKETT, WESLEY.—Last heard from in the Hawaiian Islands, in 1924. Right hand is crippled. Information appreciated by his niece, Nellie Cleveland, care of this magazine.

FULLER, SAMUEL FLOYD.—About thirty-five years old. Last heard from in Folsum City, California, in 1911. Information appreciated by H. Harvey, 119 Omar Street, Pontiac, Michigan.

BENNETT, JIM.—Last heard from in Cherokee, Kansas, in 1906. Please write to your old friend, who is now a widow, Mrs. Edith Sparks, Box 126, Hutchins, Texas.

ATKINS, RAYMOND and MABEL.—Formerly from Kentucky. Lived at one time in Elyria, Ohio. Information appreciated by Herbert P. Carl, 688 East 128th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

HAL.—Everything settled at home. Arrived in Fort Worth two weeks after you left. Please write to Pala, care of this magazine.

GINGER.—You have two little fellows who want you to come home. Cannot account for this. Please write to E. M. C., care of this magazine.

HUBBELS, GEORGE.—Was adopted by Chauncey Hubbels twenty years ago. Please write to your only sister, Mrs. A. B. Clark, R. A., Box 439, Selma, California.

REID, ROBERT.—I hear from your mother, Albert, Harvey, and Hiram and would like to hear from you. Please write to your sister Jane, Mrs. A. B. Clark, R. A., Box 439, Selma, California.

BAKER, ISABEL.—Last heard from in Michigan about seven years ago. Have written to you three times, but letters returned. Please write to your chum of Franklin Junior High, Emily, care of this magazine.

CALCUTT, CHARLES.—About fifty years old. Last heard from in 1896, when he was leaving New York City on the Fall River boat. Information appreciated by M. F., care of this magazine.

NASH, RICHARD CLAYTON.—Left his home in Virginia about forty years ago. Information concerning him or his relatives appreciated by his son, William A. Nash, R. F. D., Ayden, North Carolina.

BOND, FRED.—Thirty-three years old. Served in the army during the World War. Was located at Camp Jackson, South Carolina. Last heard from in New York City, in January, 1926. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Frank Bond, 28 Walker Street, Charlestown, Massachusetts.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any who served in the Eighth Company, 157th Depot Brigade, Camp Gordon, Georgia. Ex-Lieutenant R. Templin, Box 88, Muncie, Indiana.

FORD, CHARLES V.—About fifty-four years old. A printer and linotype operator. White hair. Formerly lived in Danville, Illinois, and Mason City, Iowa. Please write to Clement R. Brown, 1510 Newton Street, N. E., Washington, D. C.

MARTIN, GUY J.—About fifty-four years old. A printer. Formerly lived at 61 High Street, Cleveland, Ohio. Please write to Clement R. Brown, 1510 Newton Street, N. E., Washington, D. C.

DEARIE.—I love you and want you. Please come home. Widder, care of this magazine.

OLIVER, JOHN and MONA.—Left Chicago, Illinois, in June, 1927. Please write to your sister, Dora, Mrs. William Burton, 580 North Park Street, Columbus, Ohio.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from any of my old friends. William C. Church, Box 825, Oakland, California.

McCOMAS, CHARLES C.—About sixty years old. Left Kansas City, Missouri, in 1904. Believed to have gone South. Information appreciated by his son, James M. McComas, Box 43, South Fort Smith, Arkansas.

HORTON, THOMAS BENJAMIN, MARY JANE.—Ages, sixty-five, sixty-three and sixty-one, respectively. They were placed in a Catholic orphanage near New York City when they were small children. Information concerning them appreciated by their brother, John Horton, care of this magazine.

PERRY, CAPTAIN FRED L.—Was stationed at Fort Monroe, Virginia, in 1914. Wish to establish proof of army service of my late husband, John Eberhard, who served with your division. Please write to Mrs. Phoebe Eberhard, Lava Hot Springs, Idaho.

FAIN, CALVIN.—Nineteen years old. Left Henryetta, Oklahoma, in June, 1917. Information appreciated by his sister, Neva Barnes, Route 1, Marlow, Oklahoma.

FAIN, ALTON.—Twenty-one years old. Last heard from in Richton, Mississippi. Information appreciated by his sister, Neva Barnes, Route 1, Marlow, Oklahoma.

TERREL, OWEN.—Last heard from in Denver, Colorado. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

RANDALL, FRED.—Lived in Ione, Oregon, in 1924. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Bergena Randall, 321 Twenty-first Street, Oakland, California.

BLAND, SUSIE.—Last heard from in Memphis, Tennessee, in April, 1919. Has a daughter, Mary, and a son, Milton. Please write to your sister, M., care of this magazine.

BURGAMY, THOMAS A.—Last heard from in Amarillo, Texas, in 1927. An oil-field worker and tool dresser. Has relatives in Oklahoma and Kansas. Information appreciated by Lillian Wright, Route 5, Pawnee, Oklahoma.

TOLAND, CARL.—Twenty-five years old. Last heard from in DeQueen, Arkansas, in 1924. Information appreciated by his niece, Rachel Leard, Harrold, Texas.

STOWERS, WILLIAM ROBERT.—Thirty-nine years old. Last heard from in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in 1917. Mother died nine years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Goldie Murphy, Route 2, Nevada, Missouri.

PSYHER, HORACE.—Last heard from in Pennsylvania. A bridgeman. Please write to John Manes, Oakfield, New York.

ADAMS, THEODORE.—Seventeen years old. Left home on August 18, 1926. Everything is all right, and you will not get into trouble for what happened if you will come home or write to your mother, Mrs. R. Adams, Box 477, Port Dover, Ontario, Canada.

FRICKE, HARRY H.—Last heard from in Colorado, in 1911. Information appreciated by his brother, Dan Fricke, 6125 Mayflower Avenue, Maywood, California.

JARVIS, JOHN L.—Of Miami, Florida. Last heard from in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1919. Please write at once to Nettie E., 829½ East Tenth Street, Long Beach, California.

NIXON, SHERMAN.—Please write to your old pal, Bennie Parish, Route 1, Box 159, Shreveport, Louisiana.

DUNN, OSCAR.—Last heard from five years ago when he was on his way to a health spring in Michigan. Please write to your namesake, Oscar Dunn Leeper, 1218 Sycamore Street, Waterloo, Iowa.

SMITH, CHARLIE.—Last heard from thirty years ago. Was manager of the Walter Pierce Oil Co., in Tyler, Texas. Information appreciated by J. L. P., care of this magazine.

GLEN, WILL.—Last heard from in Texas, twenty years ago. Was a telegraph operator and a railroad brakeman. Information appreciated by J. L. P., care of this magazine.

WALKER, DICK.—Last heard from in February, 1928. Please come home at once. R. I. Walker, Box 252, Tecumseh, Oklahoma.

DADDY AL.—My letters to you in San Francisco returned. Am at father's. Please write at once to Marie, care of this magazine.

WALLACE, CLARENCE B.—Last seen in Joplin, Missouri, en route to Oklahoma, several years ago. Anxious to hear from you and your family. Please write to Mrs. Mattie Anderson Hammack, 2217 Murphy Avenue, Joplin, Missouri.

HATCHER, DAVID.—Left Birmingham, Alabama, September 27, 1927. Has a scar on back of left arm. Information appreciated by his sister, Maggie Hatcher, 720 West Twentieth Street, Birmingham, Alabama.

VELMA and CLARKE.—Sad news about "Trooper" in Nicaragua. He loved you, Velma. Remember the scorched pudding? His buddy, Debere Sterling, Jackson, Michigan.

FAUTH, R. A.—Last heard from in November, 1925, when he was on the U. S. S. "Holland." Information appreciated by N. S. Roberts, Y. T. I. B., Navy Air Station, San Diego, California.

PORTER, G. E.—Miriam was run over the day you left. She calls for her dear daddy. We need you. Come home at once. Have moved to Albert K.'s house on George Street. Your loving wife, B. L. P., care of this magazine.

GUFFEY, FRANK.—Forty-nine years old. Has a scar on his throat. Last heard from five years ago when working on the good roads near Dallas, Texas. Information appreciated by his first wife's son, O. C. Guffey, care Oscar Cheney, Route 3, Annana, Texas.

KEYZER, or KING, W. R.—Am heartbroken. Please write to me at once. Information appreciated by Mrs. W. R. Keyzer, 430 East Yomhill Street, Portland, Oregon.

KNAPP, RAY HUGH.—Nineteen years old. Your stepfather, James Close, has passed away. Your grandmother who brought you up needs you and would like to hear from you. Mrs. F. W. Knapp, 212 Merchant Street, Fairmont, West Virginia.

BARTKO, JOHN.—Last heard from in Winnipeg, Canada. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Mary Bartko Hekel, 618 Huron Street, S. E., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

ZELMA.—I am waiting and watching for your return. A. S. M., care of this magazine.

CLARKSON, or CLARK, EDWARD.—Last heard from in Watkins Glen, New York, in August, 1927. Everything forgotten. I love you and am true. Jean is with me. Please write to your wife, Florence, 221 West Willow Street, Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

WALTER.—Am lonely. Everything O. K. Please come home. Marion, care of this magazine.

JOHNNIE.—All is forgiven. Please come home. Marjorie, care of this magazine.

McMAHAN, FRANK.—Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri. Information appreciated by Inez, care of this magazine.

KINNEY, LAURA LEE.—Sixteen years old. Believed to be in Pyote or Wink, Texas. Information appreciated by her mother, Mrs. J. Kinney, care J. Fritsch, 716 Eleventh Street, Union City, New Jersey.

WOODS, MRS. STELLA, nee **MOORE.**—Formerly of Arkansas. Information appreciated by Mrs. C. N. Stevens, 8833 South Claiborne Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana.

VAN CLEAVE, WILLIS SEARL.—Twenty-nine years old. Last heard from in San Francisco, California, six years ago. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Byron L. Hart, Hitchcock, South Dakota.

STEWARD, LONNIE.—Last heard from in Birmingham, Alabama. Believed to be in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by his cousin, Mrs. Lois Quinn Adams, 3912 Fourteenth Street, Ecorse, Michigan.

FRAZIER, JOE C.—Forty-four years old. Last heard from in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1921. Information appreciated by his brother, R. C. Frazier, Route 1, Box 9, Columbus, Mississippi.

NEILL, JAMES.—We have no home now. Please come back to your wife and four babies. We need you. Mrs. N., care of this magazine.

BOHNE, CHARLES, MRS. ANNA RICKETT, and families.—Formerly of Wilkinsburg and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Moved to a small town in Texas. Please write to your old friends, Gottlieb and Elfrieda Mers, 2200 Bowman Avenue, McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

HOWELL, BILL HENRY.—Last heard from in Oklahoma. Information appreciated by Lonnie Howell, Route 2, Box 7, Steele, Missouri.

SMITH, JAMES E., or **G. W. BURKE.**—Left Scotland for Canada, in 1920. Last heard from in Westwood, California, in 1924. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. S. Smith, 192 Elder Street, Gouhan, Glasgow, Scotland.

BROWN, A. WILLIAM.—Formerly of Massachusetts. Do you remember Bill, of Staten Island, who served with you in the Eleventh Cavalry, Troop M, during the World War? His sister is anxious to hear from you. Please write to B., care of this magazine.

CAHILL, RICHARD, and adopted daughter, **CLARA EVELYN.**—Lived in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, in 1920. Clara Evelyn was fourteen years old on March 30, 1928. She was the daughter of Edward Roberts of Windsor, Ontario, now residing in Brockville, Ontario. Information appreciated by the child's aunt, Mrs. Charles Fyfe, Box 598, Nelson, British Columbia, Canada.

LEWIS, WILLIE and **WILLARD.**—Please write to your sister Florence, care of this magazine.

OLLOM, WILLIAM R.—Last heard from at Angel Island, California, in 1912. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Pearl Ollom Minshull, 924 Vienna Street, San Francisco, California.

HAZEL.—Do you remember December, 1913? If you do not care to let me know where you are, write to me through this magazine. I was married in 1914. Have changed location. Mother and dad in the same place. Have important news. Your cousin, Nellie, care of this magazine.

KERSHNER, RAY.—Twenty-six years old. Dark hair and eyes. Last heard from in Wichita Falls, Texas, about four years ago. Information appreciated by J., care of this magazine.

HALLMAN, GRACE BOSTON.—Twenty-one years old. Lived in California at one time. Last heard from in Hood River, Oregon. Information appreciated by her anxious mother, Mrs. Amy Rader, Baker, Oregon.

WEBERGER, MRS. MARY.—Formerly of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Lived for several years in Atikokan, Ontario, Canada. Information appreciated by N. Dolick, Transcona, Manitoba, Canada.

MYERS, STELLA and **ALFRED.**—Formerly of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Their mother died four years ago and they were placed in an orphanage and later adopted. Information appreciated by their cousin, Goldie Miller, care of this magazine.

NEAL, THOMAS W.—Twenty-one years old. A minister. Disappeared while in western Kansas, in December, 1927. Information appreciated by station agent, U. P. R. R. Co., Millidale, Nebraska.

HARDEN, CHARLES RAYMOND.—Information concerning him appreciated by M. Cooper, 469 Vernon Street, San Francisco, California.

WRIGHT, MRS. DRUSIE.—Last heard from in Olivia, Minnesota. Believed to be in Arkansas. Information appreciated by Laddie, care of this magazine.

NEWMAN, MRS. LAURA RIDGWAY, MRS. FLORENCE STAMPLEY, MRS. BETTY QUINN, and **MRS. MAGGIE ROGERS.**—Lived in Sunflower, Mississippi, prior to 1900, and in Galveston, Texas, in 1908. Information appreciated by M. B. Green, 21 Madison Street, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

HAMON, STUART L.—Formerly of 86 Livingston Avenue, Yonkers, New York. Attended No. 3 School, on Hamilton Avenue. Information appreciated by your old schoolmate, Leonard A. Smith, 438 South Columbus Avenue, Mount Vernon, New York.

VAUGHAN, JAMES E.—My father, who was separated from my mother twenty-three years ago, in New Mexico, when I was five years old. Please write to your daughter, Thelma Vaughan, 524 North Handley, Wichita, Kansas.

SULLIVAN, JOHN.—Last heard from in Fargo, North Dakota, in November, 1910. Please write to your adopted daughter, Olive Louise Krueger, 405 West Sixth Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

BOYLE, CLAUDE OLIVER.—Information appreciated by Dorothy V. Steck, care Lookout Mountain Security Co., Route 3, Golden, Colorado.

SCHEUNERT, ARTHUR OSCAR.—Last heard from on April 3, 1903, when working in a shingle mill thirty miles from Los Angeles, California. Believed to have gone to Denver, Colorado. Information concerning him, dead or alive, appreciated by his brother, Leonard Scheunert, 348 East Maclà Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota.

STAPLES, EARL.—Who advertised for Sallie Staples, please send for letters held at this office.

BUNN, MYRTLE HELEN.—Answered your ad but letter returned. Yearning for you. Please send correct address to Mother, care of this magazine.

L. I. E.—Who advertised for G. L. E. We are holding letters for you at this office. Important.

FELIX EVERETT.—The past is gone. There is nothing to forgive. Have forgotten all. Shall always love you. Please write to your heartbroken mother, Mrs. Anna E. Kenneke, care of this magazine.

BOWMAN, LEODA.—About twenty-six years old. Born in Tennessee. Lived at one time in Pueblo, Colorado. Last heard from she was working in the Minnequah Hospital. Please write to your old friend, Peggy, care of this magazine.

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ey gave me the "ha-ha" when I offered to play

... but I was the life of the party after that

THE first day of Dorothy's house party at the shore had been a huge success. After swimming, boating and golfing all were ready for the wonderful dinner that followed.

"Well, folks," said Bill, as we left the table, "I'm all set for a good dance."

"Fine," cried Dorothy. "Dick can make the banjo hum. Who'll play the piano?"

All looked at one another foolishly.

"Jim, you play, don't you?" asked Dot.

"Yes, I'll play 'Far, Far Away,'" laughed Jim.

"Well, then, Mabel, will you help us out?"

"Honestly, Dot, I hate to admit it, but I can't play a note," she answered.

It certainly looked as if the party were going flat.

Then I Offered to Play

"If you folks can stand it," I offered shyly, "I'll play for you."

The crowd instantly burst out into laughter.

"You may be able to play football, Jack, but you can't tackle a piano."

"I've never heard you play a note and I've known you all your life," cut in another.

As I strode to the piano I chuckled to myself: I had a surprise in store for them.

No one knew what to expect. They thought I was about to make a fool of myself.

Then—I struck the first snappy chords of that foot-loosing foxtrot, "St. Louis Blues." Dick, dumfounded, almost dropped his banjo. But in a flash he had picked up the rhythm and was strumming away like mad.

The crowd were all dancing in a jiffy Foxtrots and waltzes—with rests few and far between.

After a good round of dancing I decided to give them some real music and began a beautiful Indian love lyric.

The couples were now seated quietly about the room, entranced by that plaintive melody.

No sooner had the last soft notes died away than I was surrounded by my astonished friends.

"How wonderful, Jack! Why haven't you played for us before?"

"How long have you been studying?"

"Why have you kept it a secret all these years when you might have been playing for us?"

"Who gave you lessons? He must be wonderful!"

I Reveal My Secret

Then I explained how I had made up my mind to go in for something besides sports. I wanted to play—to entertain others—to be popular. But when I thought of the great expense and long study and practice required, I hesitated.

Then one day I ran across an announcement in a magazine telling of a new, quick and simple way to learn music at home, without a teacher.

I was a little skeptical at first, but I sent for the free booklet and demonstration lesson. The moment I saw it I was convinced and sent for the complete course.

When the lessons arrived I started right in giving a few minutes of my spare time each day. And what fun it was. No monotonous scales—no tedious exercises—no tricky methods—just a simple, common-sense system that even a child could understand. And I was playing my favorite numbers almost from the start.

* * * * * * *

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